I AM A RABBI'S WIFE

ESTHER BENGIS

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by

ESTHER BENGIS

1936
ESTHER BENGIS
1404 MONMOUTH AVENUE
LAKEWOOD, N. J.

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by
Esther Bengis

To my husband, who has taught me that life
may be made happier by service
and sacrifice.

INTRODUCTION

The following pages comprise a brief record of experiences, facts and observations, covering a period of over a dozen years.

The commonly accepted axiom of a woman's importance in a man's life and career is particularly applicable to the minister's wife. She shares not only in his honor and success, but in his disappointment and heartache as well. When he is no longer physically able to carry on his work, when the acclaim of the multitude has died away it is she and his mother who remain by his side in his sorrow and loneliness.

At thirty-seven, my husband is physically disabled. A gallant struggle of three years has been valiantly waged and lost. The breaking of his health in the ministry does not make us bitter. It was an investment worth while. As we both look back upon the years of service and of usefulness we have no regret. True, there were many hours of pain and grief in these years. But there were also hours of joy and of happiness. What mattered the petty

politics of a few men whose vanity and wealth deluded them to aspire to unmerited and autocratic leadership, if we could but bring some cheer to humble homes and hungry hearts? Or of what account were the criticism and ire of some social-climbing and capricious women, if we could but exert some beneficial influence or have some part in moulding the character of their neglected children?

My husband's ministry was filled with toil and with vigor. It took its toll of a broken heart. We derive comfort from the thought that our joint labors were honest and sincere and prompted by the highest ideals. We derive satisfaction from the friends made during these years of service who remained constant and true despite adversity and absence.

The thought of our work and friends is comforting, inspiring treasured memories which we shall forever cherish.

Esther Bengis.

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THE SYNAGOGUE

The Synagogue, being the spiritual center of Jewish life, is for the rabbi the central point of his activity. Here his talents and capabilities come into play. Here his years of study bear their fruit.

Rabbi Bengis, coming from a rabbinical family, received his early religious training in Russia. He spent eight years from the age of four to twelve in the old *Cheder** At the age of eight he began his Talmudic study. The same year he intoned the *Megillah* at the local synagogue, an event that caused quite some comment. Coming to America at the age of twelve, he continued his secular and religious studies in New York. His Jewish studies were always supervised by his sainted father, and zealously watched over by his pious mother.

The European groundwork of religious education, though a hard grind and lacking in

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* The meaning of words in italics will be found in the glossary.

system, proved very beneficial to my husband. He was able happily to combine the substance of the old with the technique of the new. Traditional Judaism becomes very beautiful when interpreted in modern vein. This was always his aim and striving. He would never be content to make any utterance from the pulpit unless he had a solid Jewish thought to present. The language and dressing of the idea were secondary considerations. Confidence and experience, plus ability, and solid thought manage to find their expression. In fact, my husband's sermons—as far as language was concerned—were always spontaneous. The result was impressive and effective. His sermons and speeches had human warmth and feeling—very frequently a touch of the romantic and emotional.

Rabbi Bengis speaks Yiddish as fluently and eloquently as he does English.

In his last position, a modern orthodox temple, he also served the strictly orthodox congregation part time, officiating there occasionally on holidays, and delivering Yiddish sermons and addresses. This synagogue con-

tributed to his own congregation for these services. In his own pulpit, he frequently spoke in Yiddish on Sabbath mornings and Holidays. His Yiddish was of the purer kind.

Rabbi Bengis is a lover of Yiddish as well as of Hebrew literature. His collection of Yiddish books formed quite an extensive part of his library, including many rare volumes. His Yiddish library was once "written up" by a New York Yiddish daily newspaper.

I have digressed from the subject matter of this chapter to give the reader a better idea and afford a clearer understanding of the background of my husband's career as rabbi. His versatility in synagogue services was universally admired and enjoyed. Thus, when in his last position, he announced that he would read the *Megillah* on *Purim night,* a record-breaking attendance turned out. On another occasion, during the illness of the regular reader, he read out of the *Torah* for a number of Sabbaths. I recall, too, how on one *Rosh Hashanah,* the venerable *Shofar* blower couldn't produce the necessary notes, and reluctantly gave up the job, and how my husband

came to the rescue, to the surprise of the entire congregation.

In our last position, we also held joint services with the reform congregation twice annually. On one occasion, both congregations would gather at our temple, when their rabbi would speak, while my husband officiated, and on another occasion, this would be reversed, with my husband preaching the sermon. Usually, we were guests at the reform temple during *Succoth,* while the reform congregation members were our guests on Sabbath during *Chanukah* week.

In the modern orthodox synagogue, as well as in the reform temple, the outstanding function is the late Friday evening service, held at 8 o'clock. A modern rabbi's success is usually gauged by the crowd he is able to attract to these services. From this standpoint my husband was very successful. Besides his personality and ability to make these services interesting, he attributed this success to two other factors. The first was brevity. He seldom if ever spoke over twenty minutes at these services, and they were usually concluded within

the hour. He also insisted on beginning on time — even if the president had not yet arrived. The other factor was the social touch he tried to add to the religious gathering. These services were to be not only the hour of spiritual edification but also the occasion of exchanging Sabbath greetings among members—many of whom met on no other occasion during the week. Here the Ladies' Auxiliary stepped in. Whenever there was a special Sabbath, they readily served tea and refreshments in the vestry room of the synagogue, following the services.

In our last position, Rabbi Bengis also acted as *Chazen*. On High Holidays this proved quite a strain. To deliver sermons, and to conduct services, being on his feet and chanting for hours, and on *Yom Kippur*, fasting all day, as well, was no easy task. But the people liked Rabbi Bengis's *Davening*. He was also eager to save the congregation the money.

The first year, when the officers asked the rabbi whether he would do all this without expecting extra material recompense, his response was characteristic. "All that I am,

and all that I may possess," he promptly replied, "is always at the service and disposal of my congregation."

It was on a Friday afternoon during the Christmas week that Rabbi Bengis suffered his most serious heart attack. He had made extensive plans during the week for a special students' homecoming and welcome service. He had sent hundreds of letters of invitation to all the Jewish students at the State University. The Auxiliary was to give a reception in honor of the students after the services. He had also prepared a special sermon in keeping with the occasion.

All of this must have subconsciously worried him, for his first words on regaining consciousness, hours later, were: "I must go to *Shool!*"

The president of our Young Peoples League, in our last position, was a competent and useful young man. He considered himself not only the rabbi's pal, but also his assistant. Many a time did he conduct the services on Friday night, when Rabbi Bengis was ill. He acquitted himself creditably in this as well as in Sunday School and other matters.

Although a "pulpit scolding" is sometimes in line, Rabbi Bengis tried to avoid the mistake of so many rabbis in making these scoldings a regular habit. He realized that people who come to services have some religious feeling as evidenced by their attendance. They all have their troubles and business worries, too. He would rather strive to encourage and cheer as much as possible.

If a rebuke or reproach was administered, even mildly, you would invariably hear the few wise ones say afterwards, "Didn't he give it to THEM!" Those who make such remarks are usually the most guilty. It is this type in the community who always speak ill of "them." By "them" they mean all except themselves. If such a person has something laudatory to relate you can be sure it is about "I."

Then, there is the eternal critic who will always find some fault with the sermon. This type can never be pleased. He comes in advance looking for a flaw. The substance does not matter. He sits there with his grin and superior air, knits his brow and assumes

his sneer. He turns this way and that, looks cynically about him—his whole bearing is a challenging affront. To the novice, this type is most dangerous, as he can easily lose himself. It requires self-control and experience to avoid a clash or an outburst.

It is a known fact that the Jewish pulpit is not only most liberal in its utterances, but that its ministers are, as a rule, unbridled and their sermons uncensored. The lay leader or rich member is very little concerned about IDEAS expounded in a sermon. Even the ultra-modern rabbi has no fear of being charged with heresy. But woe betide the rabbi if anything "personal," either spoken or implied, is mentioned from the pulpit. Though the fearless rabbi is not deterred by threats or coercion, the timid one is soon frightened into submission.

I am happy in the thought that my husband's ministry has always been of the higher kind. His utterances were frank and sincere. He was honest in his convictions. He did not cater to the rich or powerful, or to any special group. He respected the humble and the poor.

and loved the masses of the people. For their sake he gave his all, sparing neither his health nor his material security, as the case might demand. As he once said during an installation address, "I have no master but my conscience and serve only my people." He might be tactful and diplomatic in other matters but in this he was unyielding and uncompromising. There is only one way possible for the honorable man—and this my husband always followed. He would always say to me that if the time ever came that he couldn't freely speak his mind from the pulpit—it would then be time to leave the ministry.

Even now he has the satisfaction in knowing that his voice was always raised in the cause of justice and right.

Once the synagogue used to be the scene of many weddings. Now a wedding at the synagogue is the exception rather than the rule. When such a wedding does take place, it is usually attended by a cheap display of finery and a show of fashions. I am reminded of such a case. The family were newly rich and social climbers. My husband was just getting

over an illness. They 'phoned, asking him to come over to the synagogue to attend a rehearsal of the order of march, etc. Naturally I said he couldn't go. Those people became our enemies.

But if weddings at the synagogue are scarce, memorial services for the dead do attract large crowds. There are four occasions for such services during the year. Does the synagogue have to be the scene only of tears and of grief, while *Simchas* and happy celebrations are taken elsewhere? It was not intended thus. But so often it looks that way. How those people fear death! And how they come creeping back to the synagogue to say *Yizkor!*

This same synagogue which the departed parent attended, and loved and helped to maintain—perhaps even to build—is seemingly no longer good enough for them, and not in keeping with their social aspirations. But how they come back home to have a good cry! I always pitied them.

Special Sabbaths in honor of important organizations and notable events would frequently be observed at the Friday night ser-

vices. In the case of an organization, a representative, usually the president, would speak briefly on its work, while the rabbi devoted his sermon to the broader aspect of the organization's place in Jewish life. Thus, there were special Sabbaths set aside for the Hebrew School, Sunday School, Hebrew Free Loan Society, etc.; Hadassah and Council of Jewish Women Sabbaths were celebrated on dates coinciding with national observance throughout the country. Jewish Book Week, celebration of anniversaries of the Balfour Declaration, etc., were among other observances. Congregational officers, and officers of affiliated organizations, as Ladies Auxiliary and Young People League, were usually presented to the congregation on Friday night services following the respective elections.

I recall, too, the Friday night when the members of three local lodges of a certain fraternal order which the rabbi had recently joined came marching to the synagogue as guests of my husband. The congregation was impressed by their presence. The visitors were equally impressed by the services. This was repeated

the following year, and became a tradition while my husband was in that pulpit.

Once Rabbi Bengis delivered an Armistice Day sermon. Naturally, he stressed the value of peace. The papers carried a report of the sermon. The following day, the local American Legion Commander called on the phone, vehemently protesting against my husband's "radical" utterances. And the irony of it was that this super-patriot was himself a Jew!

On a number of occasions our services were broadcast over the radio. Two incidents in this connection are worth recording. One was when, after an operation, I was unable to attend the Passover evening service that was to be put on the air. We were without a radio in the house at the time. The valiant and friendly *Shames* came to the rescue with an earphone radio which he put up and connected hurriedly in the emergency. My husband's voice never sounded sweeter. The other radio incident was even more touching. It was contained in a letter my husband received from a Jew in a remote village. He had been accustomed to go to the city on each *Yahrzeit* for

his father. He hadn't missed once. On this particular Friday night, his *Yahrzeit* anniversary, he had been forced to remain at home due to his wife's illness. He was brooding over this as a child turned on the radio—and suddenly he heard my husband beginning the familiar words of the *Kaddish*. He jumped up and followed the prayer word for word. He was so elated, that he offered in his letter to help in the cost, if we would only broadcast our services each Friday.

One thing that I could not understand was the incongruous and sometimes vexing complex of "dual membership" of some of our pillars. It often happened that the president of our congregation and quite a number of our Board members were also members of the reform temple. On the surface this looked like a gesture of good will. But when one considers that this was one-sided, that seldom if ever was the president, or were the officers, of a reform temple or any of their "hundred per cent" members affiliated with our congregation, the inconsistency becomes more glaring.

From a practical and material standpoint, as well, such policy was wrong. The membership of the reform congregation is made up of the richer element of Jewry. While our congregation is staggering under the heavy burden of a mortgage and other expenditures, maintaining a Hebrew School, etc., our leaders—and members from the ranks follow their example—are paying as much, and often more, in membership dues to the other and richer congregation from which materially we receive nothing in return.

My husband looked askance at this unhealthy condition. While a lover of peace and harmony, he believed in and urged reciprocity and dignified equality.

Another disquieting feature was the inferiority complex of these same offenders. While at the reform temple they would meekly and quietly observe the decorum there in vogue, at our own synagogue they would assume a haughty and domineering attitude. Their manner was loud and boisterous. They not only did violence to the English language but, by their barbaric deportment, also outraged the

sensibilities of the more refined members of the congregation.

We were always happy and grateful that these synagogue marauders were but few in number. Yet, they always managed to make things unpleasant, and render the otherwise sacred synagogue atmosphere uncomfortable.

Was it because they felt quite at home in their synagogue?

OUR HOME

Our home has in truth been our sanctuary and our refuge. In it we found comfort and relaxation. The tranquillity and peace within its walls served as a tonic, soothing our spirits and healing the hurts and scars, sustained in the battles without. These precious hours of repose were rare, and for that reason all the dearer to us.

Our home was very often the scene of communal activity. Thus, an important meeting of the Board of the Congregation might be held there. Meetings of other important organization officers, committees and other such groups were very frequent. The Sunday School staff was a favorite of these.

On such occasions it would become my function to serve refreshments following the completion of the business meeting.

My husband is a great believer in this "social touch" added to business. He also believed in the "charm" of our home environment when a communal deal had to be put

over. Very often, too, a number of leading prospects in a forthcoming campaign were by this method successfully ensnared.

Of visitors we had many, ranging from national figures in American Jewry to the wandering knights of the road. I recall the incident of one of these who, after being fed and supplied with cigarettes and other things, asked for a dollar that he might have his suit pressed!

Some rabbis and other visitors who spent week-ends or longer periods with us were pleasant and considerate. Others were not. There were even those who demanded attention, gave orders as to preferences and in other ways made themselves obnoxious. One young man spent two weeks at our home. He was royally treated and had to be especially catered to on account of being a vegetarian. He was in mortal dread of some secret enemy. We helped to save him. He left us without a word of appreciation.

But there were many others who did remember our kindness. There was a widow who died in my arms. Her son and three daughters

were at our home for quite some time until permanent arrangements were made. The boy, whom my husband confirmed, is now a brilliant young attorney. He and the girls still write to us, and to this day we are to them "Big Bud" and "Big Sis," names they affectionately bestowed on us. This one instance answers the oft-repeated question, "Is kindness worthwhile?"

If the Sabbath is a day of blessing for religious people, it has always proved especially so for my husband—and for myself, too, for that matter. It was the only day that he could completely relax, a thing almost impossible the rest of the week. Even in moments of leisure during the week, there was the constant tension and momentary expectation of the ominous ringing of the telephone or the equally disquieting and speculative buzzing of the door bell. What a dread these signals of broken peace became! Imagine this. After we spend nearly forty-eight hours at a sick bed at the home of a dear friend—after the culmination of the tragedy, we come home from the cemetery for recuperation. As I am pre-

paring the coffee and my husband is removing his coat, the phone rings. We instinctively tremble. Our foreboding proves correct. It is a terrible message. A young widow has committed suicide. Again we are on our way to continue our sad ministrations.

A good number of marriages were celebrated at our home. Many couples came unexpectedly. Either because they came from out of town, or for some other urgent reason, our own program and plans had to be subordinated and often canceled. The romantic touch at these marriages was supplied by our *Chupah* which came from across the sea and was inherited from my husband's father. The silver wine goblet came from the same source. This is used also for *Kiddush* on Sabbaths and holidays. Because of my help, preparing for and during these ceremonies, my husband would often jokingly refer to me as his *Shames*.

I believe the bride's kiss my husband enjoyed most was that of the young lady who six years previously had been a member of his confirmation class.

An amusing incident occurred once when the bride, at the conclusion of the ceremony kissed my husband before her own. Perhaps this was a gesture of gratefulness, for the bride in question was dangerously approaching the age of the dreaded old-maid.

Of those who called at our home for a social visit there were few who did it humanly, as friends should. The official and conventional air we were constantly being subjected to, and which we tried to escape, was thus brought to the very realm of our home. We were forced to listen to all sorts of nonsense and to a good bit of gossip. Ulterior political motives would soon become evident in the crude and unrestrained anxiety of our visitor, who aspired to communal or organization leadership. My husband's good will and support were desirable.

Happy were the moments at home when my husband, in his slippers, and with collar removed, could informally indulge with a friend in a game of chess. Or when we could quietly relax for one brief and rare hour with our own thoughts and our own company. How roman-

tic I thought it was when we could leave everything and slip away to a picture show. How my husband chuckled when he broke away from an "important" ladies' meeting and made straight for the ball park. Or when he abruptly left a social function to be in time for a radio rendition of his favorite symphony.

These "irregularities," however, were few and far between. But we enjoyed them immensely.

Newspaper reporters were occasional visitors. They came for statements and opinions after momentous events, as well as on other occasions, when the city editor was after something Jewish. Thus when word came of Henry Ford's recantation of Anti-Semitic propaganda, a reporter was not long in coming for a statement. When a rabbi in another city named what he considered five greatest Jews that ever lived, and similarly five outstanding Christians, my husband's opinion and list were quickly solicited. When Woodrow Wilson lay critically ill, an enterprising city editor sent his reporters to the Catholic priest, to the Protestant minister, and to my husband, requesting

each to write a brief prayer for the war president's recovery. Next morning the three prayers appeared, boxed on the front page, with the picture of each author accompanying the prayer. It was perhaps a good newspaper scoop, but alas! Wilson was dead by the time the paper was on the streets!

We were often disturbed at unreasonable hours by people calling on the 'phone seeking all sorts of information. More often than not, their questions were silly. More recently, I would not disturb my husband, especially at meal time, unless the nature of the call warranted such action.

Many were the people who came to seek not only financial aid but also advice. Family troubles and other such matters were brought to our house. My husband was never too tired or too busy to listen to them all. He prides himself on the many reconciliations that were effected in his library. Always they came there. I never questioned. Many secrets safely repose with him. Some girls and a few women unburdened themselves to me also. These confidences were always sacred. We

did not reveal them even to each other.

No one, whether Jew or Gentile, was ever turned away from our door hungry or empty handed. It was a tradition we never broke.

In wintry weather I used to like to call our colored mail carrier or janitor into the kitchen for a hot cup of coffee. Their appreciation was profuse and sincere.

A neighbor of mine was once horrified to come into our house and find my colored girl in the living room reading the newspaper!

I was roundly criticized—for this was in the South, where colored people are by many still treated as slaves.

When we were forced to leave our last position in an effort to restore the rabbi's health, all the things of our home were put into storage. After a year passed thus, and the struggle became more intense and difficult, leaving my husband with his sister and mother, I returned to dispose of the furniture. I shall never forget the pang and choking feeling I experienced as piece after piece of our home was taken away. Our home was part of us. Into the building of it we had put years

of thought and planning, as well as all our material saving. Now it was all gone.

In the nearly fourteen years we have been married, I rarely, if ever, saw my husband cry. He tried to keep things inwardly, but before leaving our home the last time I remember how bitterly he wept. He could not hold back his tears. His weakened heart told him that he would never see those cherished things again.

It took strong faith and supreme courage to survive the ordeal. We have not yet given up. The battle may be hard. But we shall carry on.

THE SOCIAL VISIT

An important ministerial function is the social visit. We are expected to visit our members not only when some special occasion, as illness or a celebration of some kind takes place, but also to spend an evening.

It is a physical impossibility to discharge this function with satisfaction to all. Even when the rabbi cuts out a meeting or two a week and we go visiting instead, it is hard to manage. Imagine a congregation having almost three hundred members, and each one waiting for a visit from us. At the rate of two visits a week it would take three years to visit them all. By that time some of these members who at first waited for the rabbi's visit would wish we were in another community—and often their wish is realized. Perhaps the only reason underlying such a wish might be the fact that some other member was visited first.

We know of rabbis and their wives who do not visit with members unless a special occasion calls for a visit. They are perhaps wiser.

But we wanted to keep in touch with our members, and decided on the other course. The more we visited the more difficult became our problem, for social jealousies are keen and poisonous. In later years, we tried to solve the problem by augmenting our visits, by inviting members to our home to our "open house" at least once a year. But while this might be of some help it was far from a complete solution.

The rabbi had an additional problem. On his daily visit to town, he liked to stop in here and there to have a chat with a friend. These informal visits were enjoyed by my husband and appreciated by the merchant or storekeeper. My husband would tell me that he considered it a *Mitzvah* in hard days of poor business to stop in and give the poor fellow an optimistic word of cheer, tell him a story and get him to laugh. Incidentally, an invitation to attend synagogue services Friday night, delivered in such a happy moment would invariably bring better results than a cold letter read in a despondent mood. The rabbi would in some jocose manner exact a promise to attend

services. Such a promise was usually kept, as my husband followed these up. He readily noted any such absences, and good-naturedly chided the offender who promised to "sin no more."

But these visits by the rabbi to stores and places of business soon became known and constituted another source of criticism. It often came to us through devious ways that this one or that one complained that the rabbi hasn't been in for so long a time. Here, too, as in the case of social visits to the home of the member, the more frequent the visits, the more jealousy and criticism resulted.

When we paid a social visit it was considered an important event. The date was sometimes arranged weeks in advance. If something important intervened, necessitating cancellation or postponement, we were in a predicament. Some were considerate and gracious in such circumstances. But many were not. We often went on these visits while one of us felt ill, and many were the smiles that were attended by a hidden pain. Our own

grief and feelings had to be put aside lest some sensitive person feel hurt.

The "pillars" of the congregation waited for our visit challengingly. Many of these were ready to make an issue out of a possible failure on our part to pay them this homage. It was to these places that we went with heavy hearts, and there we were usually most bored. The arrogance and haughtiness of some of these people knew no bounds. For hours at a time we would be forced to listen to lengthy recitals of boastful business and community achievements that were almost nauseating. The ego was predominant in these talks. Hardly anything else was discussed.

In other places it would not be quite as bad, but usually the subject of conversation in these homes was common-place and on a low level.

If a meal was included in our visit, elaborate preparations were in evidence on our arrival. We visited many homes where a meal is attended by much pomp and ceremony—a veritable ritual. When the "passing" started my husband's look would become pitiful.

I remember how one of the post-war newly

rich, a man of immense wealth and consequently great social standing in the community, puffed up with personal satisfaction and vain pride as we entered his home. We had barely removed our wraps when he hurried us upstairs to show us first—his beautiful and bright colored bathroom!

In another instance a woman similarly made a display of her hoard of jewelry, not failing to repeat a number of times the high prices paid for each piece.

There was also the woman who invited us to her home and when we came, told us all about her expensive furniture, which was mostly kept covered, and the pains and precautions she had to take with it. It was her chief source of worry, poor soul! She had a beautiful home and was not enjoying it in the least. Her children were not allowed to sit in certain chairs, and were forbidden even to touch certain things. Hardly anyone came to visit them, for people knew of her mania. She was preserving her furniture all right, but was ruining her health, souring her disposition,

and making herself and others about her miserable while doing so.

This woman was kind enough to allow us a peek into her immaculate living room. But the two hours of our visit in that house were spent outside of that living room.

Many of the simple people we visited would act ill at ease in their self-consciousness. They would try to preserve the conventional tone, artificial mien and official atmosphere. When we saw that beneath this superficial and belabored formality there was a warm human heart, we would do our best to set them at ease. With a smile or with a humorous remark my husband would succeed to break the tenseness. It didn't take long and my husband and the host, minus their coats, would be deep in exchange of old country reminiscences and I would be in the kitchen with our hostess sampling her brand of coffee.

Usually our coming to a certain home was heralded in advance to a close circle of friends. Several of these couples would also be invited. After quite a bit of very ordinary conversation, refreshments would be offered. Knowing that

neither of us would indulge in cards, some host or hostess who could not resist the temptation for one night, would ask our permission—some went on without asking—to play. Naturally the "dispensation" was readily granted. We stayed on for a while, and soon some kind soul was good enough to see us home.

One couple that we thought better of, invited us over for a quiet evening. When we came we found quite an assortment of "loud speakers" and noted gossips. We were frankly relieved when the card game began sooner than usual. We beat a hasty retreat.

I used to admire my husband's patience and his ability to appear interested under most trying circumstances. It was an art that he was master of. Our hosts might be boring us to death, yet they thought they were entertaining us. He would say very little himself on these occasions. He would lead the boaster with a question, and a new colume of fulsome oratory would issue forth.

There was the man who had been residing in the community for over thirty years, and prided himself on his knowledge of the history

and important dates of organizations, institutions and outstanding happenings in the community during that period. He liked to be called the community historian. He was very garrulous, and woe to the victim who unwittingly asked him the question: "When did this happen?"

Having also participated in the community life to some extent, he was always loud and vociferous in self-praise, and all his "historical narratives" were colored with a goodly portion of ego. My husband good-naturedly managed to withstand his onslaughts in public and even dared to brave his tirades in the historian's home. I used to marvel how Rabbi Bengis would humor him and even venture to ask the dreaded question: "When?"

There were quite a few homes that we enjoyed visiting. Among these were not only those of our close friends, but also the homes of those where an atmosphere of culture prevailed. There were also the homes of the humble and simple folk where cordial hospitality and absence of pretense were most refreshing. But our visits to these homes were neces-

sarily limited by press of our multitudinous official calls and other duties.

If pillars and members of congregations would only free the rabbi and his wfe, and not expect our visits at their convenience, the rabbi and his wife would be much happier. If we did visit them then, it would be a voluntary expression of good will and friendship. We might do something more worth while and constructive with those hours so often wasted or spent in misery. And finally, after a hard day, perhaps we are entitled to a little freedom and relaxation of our own. Or must we constantly be deprived of each other's company, not being able to spend an evening together, as once happened for a period of nearly two months?

But since human nature is what it is, I presume that rabbis and their wives will continue to make their social visit with all the tribulations and adventures that these visits entail.

May the good Lord give them courage and strength.

WITH THE SICK

Visiting the sick is an ancient and important Jewish *Mitzvah*. But in our provincial community life it assumes a new aspect. It becomes a social function. When a person of any consequence in the community becomes ill, it becomes incumbent upon all others who are somebody to visit the patient without delay. While many of these visits may be sincere and prompted by feelings of sympathy and friendship, a good many others are merely part of a social routine.

Our position in this respect can easily be imagined. We are supposed to be mind readers and know as soon as any one becomes ill. If a few days go by and we have not yet put in an appearance, there is grumbling and many an unpleasant remark made at our expense. These critics do not stop to think that perhaps something important is detaining our visit, or perhaps we are as yet in complete ignorance of the patient's condition, as is very often the case. How much more thoughtful these people

would be if they called us, telling us of the case instead of condemning us. Some of our friends and fair-minded people would do this, and notify us that there is a new patient waiting for our visit. We would be grateful for such information. There were a number of cases where such information was purposely withheld from us, that a cause for criticism and an issue against the rabbi might be at hand! Failure to visit an important personage who is ill, is bound up with all sorts of unpleasantness, often with calamity and grief. It is a slight which the patient seldom if ever forgets or forgives.

Many times it was brought to our attention that such a failure was more marked and more aggrevated by the fact that the other rabbi in the community, the reform spiritual leader, had been there long before my husband. Attempted explanations later, of press of work, etc., were of little avail. The patient turned nurse, and nourished an everlasting grievance and grudge against the rabbi.

I am mentioning these facts because in the early part of my husband's ministry we suf-

fered greatly as a result of these grievances. As we went along, we learned more of these delicacies and intricacies of sensitive Jewish souls.

Our interest in the sick was real. Of course, there were those patients in whom we were more interested than in others, and we didn't hesitate to show this as occasion required. The sick among the poor as a rule presented a more pathetic spectacle, and if we did not bring them flowers we brought them soothing words and left cheering thoughts behind.

Once I left a bridge party in a hurry to visit a patient who did not happen to be of the elite. The socially-prominent hostess never forgave me for this "offense."

I shall never forget the night we both spent at the hospital with the family of a young man who suffered through the night and who died early the following morning. It was up to me to try to keep the mother quiet. She was hysterical almost through the whole night. And the remarkable thing was when I brought her in the room to say her final good-bye to her beloved boy, she became composed and quietly

and silently followed me to the death bed. Her son could no longer speak. But the dying look he gave his mother will be with me to my last day. The beauty, love and serenity of his look, mingled with the tragedy of the moment, will abide with me always. The mother said never a word, but just as if replying to his eloquent look, she took his hand, kissed him and left. She remained peaceful and resigned from then on.

In this connection the automobile presented to us by the congregation did good service. Hardly a day passed but that either of us, or both, drove to a hospital or a home where there was sickness. In recent years of depression we had to depend on friends and volunteers to take us to remote places. To those within walking distance we readily walked.

Once when several days passed and I didn't show up at the hospital, the mother superior of the largest hospital in town called to see whether I myself was not a patient. She frequently phoned, informing me of the arrival of a Jewish patient.

I remember an amusing incident. I was

driving with more speed than usual. There was a very sick patient at the hospital. I passed a red light and a traffic cop spied me and gave chase. When he stopped me, I hurriedly told him my mission. He followed me to the hospital, checked up and with valiant salute and smiling warning, tore up the ticket he had begun to write.

Our hearts went out to children sufferers. We did all in our power to alleviate their pain. There was one case where I had all I could do to persuade a mother to consent to the amputation of an arm of her twelve-year-old son who had been run over by a truck. The operation was essential. I finally convinced the mother that the operation was necessary to save her boy's life. I was very happy when she agreed to the operation, and more so, when the operation proved successful and the boy's life was saved.

Many were the sorrows and sufferings that we participated in. These sorrows and sufferings were keenly felt by us and we seemed to actually live through them with our patients. And even while we might be busy with such

ministrations or doing something else for others—for we were never idle—some unreasonable and stupid person who felt "indisposed" chafed and raged at our failure to come over!

There were also times when one of us was sick. I underwent several operations during my husband's time in the ministry. And many of these who are first and loudest in complaint at the least slight—real or imaginary—never came to see me. And I never held it against them.

When I think of one woman who did come, I am glad more like her didn't come. It was after a major and serious operation. I was at the hospital, just about getting over the effects of the ether. This woman came to console me, but how do you think she did it? By telling me that a sister of hers had died from the effects of an operation just like mine!

There were many, though, who were kind and considerate. During my husband's serious illness there was in particular one loyal friend who was with me through the long dreary nights when we snatched him from the jaws of

death. Her unparalleled devotion is one of the most beautiful things I got out of the many hard and trying years of our ministerial labors. Our physician, too, proved a loyal and true friend. He gave his all in the grim battle with death and emerged victorious. And he was not swayed by any hope of compensation or reward, for even the mention of such a thing aroused his resentment. He is a gentleman of high culture and refinement, a friend of whom we are proud.

The reform rabbi also proved himself a genuine friend. He is a much older man than my husband. Still they found much in common, and their friendship remains beautiful to this day. I recall the touching moment when he came to visit my husband during his illness. He had officiated at two weddings that Rabbi Bengis was to have performed. He had a letter with him. He had planned to mail it, but couldn't resist bringing it himself. In the letter he stated that he had officiated at these marriages as Rabbi Bengis's substitute, and was therefore enclosing the sum of both fees. It was the thought of the letter and the spirit

that prompted it that brought tears to our eyes.

On the whole the scales were balanced. We saw sickness and suffering. We also lived through and experienced illness and pain ourselves. We visited the sick and were in turn visited as patients. Unpleasantness was meted out to us by some but gratitude by many others. The satisfaction of relieving pain, lessening sorrow, and bringing cheer constituted our reward.

WITH THE MOURNERS

Our saddest duty was with the mourners.

A home ravaged by death is like a temple in ruins. Yet there, too, we erected our altar and served.

"Chesed shel emes," a gracious act of truth, the *Mitzvah* of tending to the dead is called, and appropriately so. It is traditionally explained that this final honor to the dead is thus called because there can be no hope of reciprocal recompense.

My husband endeavored to make the final tribute to the dead as beautiful as possible. Together we did all we could to lighten the burden of the mourners.

It is no easy task to attempt to comfort mourners while the dead is still with them. Yet we always did our best. I am happy to say we were successful to quite an extent. My husband's eulogies were soothing, and filled with human tenderness, and while he officiated and praised the dead, I was usually in the

midst of the mourners, holding an orphan in my arms, or a widow by the hand.

The efforts were most trying. Once my husband gave way at the bier of a dear friend and burst into bitter tears. Holding back the tears that often choked him in the midst of terrible tragedy, required strength and reserve energy. The reaction would often prove costly after we had returned home. He would tell me that he envied the people who could weep in public, without restraint. Here too, officialdom took its toll.

The final duty my husband performed in his last position was to officiate at the funeral of a friend. Rabbi Bengis did this when he was himself ill. But he insisted, despite the doctor's orders to the contrary, and notwithstanding my own plea. He was very stubborn in these matters and had to have his way. We feared that if we tried to stop him, the worry and mental strain would be equally as bad for him, or perhaps worse. The result was devastating. He hasn't officiated at any kind of service since.

Frequently, the reform rabbi would be called

in to participate with my husband in funeral services. Since the funeral ritual is not so rigid, a joint service was easily arranged. Usually, in such cases, the reform rabbi would officiate at the home, or funeral parlor, while Rabbi Bengis would conduct the service at the cemetery.

There was only once that such a joint service left a bad taste. The deceased had been a pioneer leader in the orthodox community. He had never been affiliated with the reform temple. But some of his children were members, and invited the reform rabbi to participate. No one raised any objection, although I have always wondered why it is that my husband, or any other orthodox or conservative rabbi, is never invited to participate in any such service, if the deceased belongs to the hundred per cent. reform group. Be that as it may, it was arranged that the reform rabbi would speak at the house, and Rabbi Bengis would deliver the eulogy at the synagogue. It is only in rare cases that the dead is honored by being taken into the synagogue. At the conclusion of the eulogy in the synagogue, Rabbi Bengis

offered his reform colleague, who was with him on the pulpit, the further courtesy of closing with a prayer. He accepted, asked the congregation to rise, raised his hand, and to the mortification of all, delivered over the corpse the three-fold benediction! Such a thing is entirely out of keeping with orthodox tradition and under the circumstances was a serious breach of religious etiquette. What added to the unpleasantness was that an old European rabbi, a *Meshulach,* was present and voiced his sentiments in no uncertain terms. If I recall correctly, the same blessing was repeated at the tombstone dedication, a year later!

I do not wish to appear to be belittling or ridiculing reform Judaism or reform rabbis. I am merely recording facts. I am desirous that this account be consistent with my husband's ministry, frank and sincere. If there is any reflection or discredit in some of these "admixtures" it is more often on the orthodox side, many of whose unscrupulous leaders are ready to "sell their birthright for a mess of pottage."

My husband has associated with many re-

form rabbis. Many are scholarly and permeated by a love of things Jewish. But occasionally, an American product displays the *Amhaaretz*. But all should not be condemned for this.

The fact is that quite a number of reform rabbis have shown genuine interest in Rabbi Bengis's plight since his illness and disability. There were a few who even surpassed his own colleagues in thoughtfulness and consideration.

I must relate an incident that occurred at our home during the week of *Shivah* following the death of my husband's father. It seems that we could never escape the ludicrous in the midst of tragedy even in our own home. To make the incident clear, I must explain that on leaving the mourner's home, it is customary to pronounce a traditional Hebrew saying which translated is as follows: "May the Lord comfort you among the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem." In the synagogue this same sentence is addressed to mourners on the Friday night of the *Shivah* week.

It was one night of the *Shivah* week. Evening services had just been completed at our

home. People came and went. One man, a prominent leader, sat through most of the evening. I wondered why he stayed so long. He usually paid his formal visit and left. That night he lingered. He looked perplexed. He sat there, pensive and thoughtful, taking very little part in the conversation (an unusual thing for him) for he always liked to monopolize conversations. He was rather quiet and continued to knit his brows. He seemed to be in deep contemplation. It was evident that he was disturbed by something and trying hard to master all his faculties to free himself from his difficulty. We both watched him, wondering what could be wrong with the man. Suddenly a gleam came into his eye. He jumped to his feet, ran over to my husband, pronounced the Hebrew formula of address to the mourner and hurriedly and triumphantly left!

Then we realized it all. This man had posed as a man of Jewish knowledge. It would never do for him to omit pronouncing that Hebrew sentence on such an occasion—and at the rabbi's house at that!

This same man had many relatives in town. When death occurred in the family, he rose to his greatest heights. He loved to arrange funerals, supervise and give orders, and if he could manage to get his favorite organization, the *B'nai B'rith*, to have its ritual at the grave, his satisfaction was complete.

It is difficult to account for human tastes and man's perversity. The show-off will peddle his wares even in the presence of death.

PRISONS AND ASYLUMS

Perhaps the work that was most human and useful was that which "took us to jail" and to the insane asylum.

Many were these cases in which we had a direct hand in alleviating suffering and in bringing salvation to those in despair. Of course, I can tell here of but a few of these.

Vagrant transients are often picked up by the police, and locked up. The Jewish ones would appeal to the rabbi. He usually got them out. He also extended some help as the case required.

Frequently, a non-Jew would also be served in the course of these ministrations.

Quite a number of boys who left home to take up the adventurous career of the road were taken to our home after their release. We showed them not only hospitality but helped to get them home. Many proved their gratefulness by writing from home. Some even returned money loaned them. One even sent a charity contribution besides paying his

personal debt! We trusted them all and were seldom disappointed.

Once we secured the release of a young man who was being dangerously enmeshed in a career of crime. He spent some time at our home. We extended him help and friendliness. We heard from him, later. We are glad to know that he is now "going straight."

On one case my husband worked for months. He finally succeeded, with the help of others, in securing a new trial for the prisoner, who at his first trial had been sentenced to life imprisonment. The second trial resulted in acquittal!

The man was deserving. He is now a useful citizen, an asset to the community and to society.

I feel that had my husband accomplished nothing else during his ministerial career, this one *Mitzvah* would be sufficient.

There was the case of the young man who was caught in the toils of the Federal law. He had entered the country illegally, having come over as a stowaway. He came from Germany, escaping from the hell of war. He was a mere

boy then. Having infringed on military law, his deportation would mean sure death. We both became interested. I am happy to say that we succeeded in saving him. A kind and able Jewish attorney, and a human and considerate Federal judge were of great help. The telegram we received from his poor mother on his acquittal brought tears to our eyes. She was hundreds of miles away, and in destitute circumstances. Her husband had died during the war. Her boy was her only comfort and hope. Now that we had restored him to her, the joy of the grateful mother knew no bounds.

Here was another great achievement of which we are proud to this day.

At another occasion, a violator of the immigration laws, similarly in danger of being deported, with a firing squad awaiting him in Poland for military desertion, was paroled to my husband's charge, pending further investigation. How he escaped that same night will always remain a mystery. I believe that in his heart the rabbi was not sorry that the young man got away, even though this caused

him embarrassment with the authorities.

I recall one case that was exclusively mine. It concerned a young man, who, while out of work and hungry, had stolen a loaf of bread. The theft landed him in jail. I heard of this and went to visit him. Because of his loud protest and unruly manner, he was not treated with any kindness. Soon he was transferred to the insane asylum. With an official, I looked through his papers, and found not only his people's address, but also his honorable discharge papers from the army. He had been shell-shocked in the war. This accounted for his "unruly manner." I succeeded in getting him in the local base hospital. He later recovered sufficiently to accept a responsible position. He seemed like a new person, amiable, intelligent, refined.

I was pleased with the result of my efforts. It was a rather remarkable and rare evolution from prison, to asylum, to hospital—and finally, liberty and happiness.

His folks, with whom I had communicated, were very grateful. Their letters showed their keen appreciation.

The above mentioned asylum was the largest in the state. There were several thousand inmates housed within its walls.

On his first visit to this institution Rabbi Bengis spent an entire day in ascertaining the number of Jewish inmates. In this he was afforded every assistance and courtesy. All office records and facilities were placed at his disposal. Over a score of Jewish inmates were soon discovered. Most of these were friendless, some even without relatives. There was no one to care about them. We soon made their lot our concern. We also interested a number of women, and formed a committee for visiting and aiding these unfortunates.

Rabbi Bengis told me how on his first visit he dropped a cigarette butt in the big hall. He was about to step on the cigarette end to extinguish it when nearly all the inmates within sight made a mad rush for it. He passed out all the cigarettes he had with him. After this, with our committee we brought weekly supplies of cigarettes and also fruit. Non-Jewish inmates shared in these delicacies to some extent.

I believe that many of the inmates of this institution either didn't belong there in the first place, or might have been cured. Many suffer from extreme nervousness and other such ailments, requiring special and individual attention. Promiscuous co-mingling doesn't help their condition. Where there are thousands of these unhappy human beings crowded together, individual attention, correct medical treatment and scientific handling become almost impossible.

Those who have no relatives or friends interested in them are as a rule allowed to rot away and are lost. In that environment, especially through neglect, some who are in the initial stages of a malady grow steadily worse.

There is much room for improvement in our state institutions of this kind. A human approach, scientific methods, and advanced medical attention and care are essentials that will have to be included in the improved system of the future.

Another evil of the present system is that it is still possible to commit a person to the

insane asylum if he becomes troublesome to authorities or undesirable to his family or relatives.

My husband succeeded in rescuing one such man, who had trouble with his children and had been put there by them. He seemed to be perfectly sane, although of an irritable and nervous temperament.

The practice of keeping the insane at county jails is also to be condemned. Of course, this is supposed to be temporary, pending final decisions on these cases, and also awaiting permanent transfer to one of the state institutions which seem to be always filled to capacity. But in either case, it is not a healthy condition. The patient is treated as a prisoner, minus any medical attention. I have known cases where patients spent months at the county jail, pending final disposition.

Another outstanding "liberation" on which my husband prides himself was replete with dramatic incidents. The woman's husband and son had brought her to the institution. It was most pathetic, as they came to our house, and with tears in their eyes implored us to do

what we could for her. Their home was hundreds of miles away. They asked that we look after her. We promised and did our full share.

She was a frail woman, and seemed gentle and kind. But she was seriously affected. It was heartrending to see her kiss her son and speak most tenderly to her husband, and in a moment she would "be off" attempting to strike them both.

She spoke scarcely any English, and here, too, our help was most beneficial. We visited her at least once a week. We were in constant touch with her family. We managed to get her before the institution's medical staff several times. Finally we managed to secure her release. She had spent about a year at the institution. Now she was cured.

The joy of the family, in which we shared, was unbounded.

This was "my husband's case." It was largely due to his efforts that the happy result was attained.

About two years later Rabbi Bengis had occasion to visit the remote community where this woman lived. He had gone there on a

Zionist mission. Imagine his joyous feeling when this woman came to visit him! She was perfectly normal, and her company was most genial.

In our work with prisoners and inmates of asylums, our labors were made easier by the courtesy, help, and consideration of the authorities and the officials. This we always appreciated. I could not help from thinking how much greater our appreciation would be, if the same measure of consideration and kindness were but shown to the unfortunates in their charge!

They certainly needed kindness and consideration more than we did!

SIMCHAS

It was during an outstanding *Simcha,* particularly a wedding, that people who love dazzling display, vied to outdo each other. The marriage of a prominent man's daughter would often be talked about months in advance, and the event was anticipated with exciting interest, and with speculation among the idle. These last would wonder whether this affair would outshine the last one, or fall short of expectations. The rounds of pre-nuptial affairs, such as luncheons, linen showers, etc., were zealously and punctually carried out by all parties concerned.

I know of cases where fathers already hard hit by the depression had to go heavily into debt to provide the daughter with an elaborate and luxurious wedding in keeping with their social standing. Many a wise philosopher would knowingly shake his head and remark that the money would have been better spent on a home and furniture for the young couple. For in most cases, the new home to be built

was either forgotten or given only secondary consideration.

The hotel marriage that was followed by a sumptuous banquet, dancing and refreshments, was the most costly. This, however, is the most stylish kind of wedding, and is preferred to the home or synagogue nuptials.

Perhaps our people brought this idea of elaborate weddings with them from across the sea. But there, these weddings were prompted by the religious sentiment largely. It was a *Mitzvah* and tradition to lead children to the *Chupah* in dignified style. It was also a *Mitzvah* to invite the poor people to such affairs, and a true democratic spirit prevailed on these occasions even in the homes of the richest. The poor would eagerly await such a golden opportunity to fill their hungry stomachs, and mingle with the elite.

My husband's mother relates how at her wedding in Lithuania, although only a girl of seventeen, she left her place at the head of the table and brought a poor man who was modest and had remained at the door, to take her place and her portion. She remarked at the time,

that she could easily receive another portion later, while the poor man who was not sufficiently aggressive might be overlooked in the crowd.

Such was the spirit that permeated old-fashioned *Simchas*. And we boast of our progress and modernism, thoughtlessly decrying the out-of-date folk and traditions which we do not know or fail to understand. Some of these old-fashioned weddings still take place now and then, but very rarely, and are the exception rather than the rule.

Tnoyim, or the engagement, which in days gone by constituted a celebration almost equal to the wedding itself, is fast becoming obsolete. If there is a celebration, it is usually restricted to a reception or an exclusively social affair. My husband has written less than half a dozen *Tnoyim* in his entire career.

Another *Simcha* that is steadily becoming a less decorative affair is the *Briss*. About ninety per cent of these ceremonies now take place in the hospital. The leading hospitals being Catholic, it sometimes happens that Jesus, from his crucifix, beams down upon the

newly initiated "Son of the Covenant" as though he would join in the "*Mazel-Tov.*"

At the wedding there is the man who has the *Chazokeh* to read the telegrams. He swells up with his own importance. He is certain not to leave out the "messages" from the president and from the governor.

In one community there are two brothers. They are cultured gentlemen, orthodox, thoroughly Americanized, and have retained an affection for the old Jewish ballad and folk song. One in particular has a fine voice. Their presence at a wedding would bring back memories and recall the ancient "*Badchan.*" They were respected even by the youth who, without comprehending the meaning of the song, nevertheless keenly sensed its beauty.

I recall a showy synagogue wedding. The bride's mother limped rather than marched. When the ceremony was over, and supper was being served, she was missed. I found her in the synagogue, sitting by herself with her shoes in her hands. I asked her whether she had a headache. "My head is alright, but my feet ache plenty," she replied. "My daughter

insisted I must wear these darned high heel shoes—my poor feet, I'm almost crippled."

A wedding once set our community agog. It was the marriage of the daughter of a pioneer leader in the orthodox community who always boasted of his important contributions to orthodox community life and orthodox institutions in the city. And in truth he was a liberal contributor and active worker. But when his daughter, his first child to be wedded, announced her coming marriage, our community was shocked. For the wedding was to take place at the reform temple! It was a slap in the face to the entire orthodox community. My husband was asked to "assist" in the ceremony. Without the slightest hesitation he refused. Besides the dignity of his position and that of his congregation that would have been compromised by his acceptance, there were also serious religious considerations. My husband refused to be party to a ceremony in which the orthodox essentials such as *Chupah, Kesubah,* and intonation of both Hebrew sets of benedictions were banned. All sorts of intimidatons and threats could not swerve Rabbi

Bengis from his resolution. He remained firm in his refusal. The community as a whole approved his stand and admired his courage.

When this man would after this run for any office, whether it was a congregational directorship or as a delegate to a fraternal convention, the "masses" would turn out in full force, with the avowed purpose of defeating him. They usually succeeded in their determined revenge.

There was another such case. The father was of the ordinary but good-natured and unassuming type. He had become rich. His wife yearned for social honor. He was a former president of our congregation. She had served as president of our Ladies' Auxiliary. Their daughter that was to be married had also served our congregation in the capacity of Sunday School teacher. The bridegroom's father was a very pious Jew who had gone to live in Palestine. With all this, a reform ceremony was desired. The place of the marriage was decided on as the leading hotel in town. My husband was called into conference. He explained that he had no objection to officiating

with the reform rabbi, but that he could perform only a ceremony with all the orthodox essentials. When my husband was asked to omit the *Kesubah* and other things, he indignantly refused.

The reason given for the request to leave out Hebrew reading, etc., was that some prominent gentile friends would be present!

As a matter of fact, gentiles who attended a Jewish wedding were usually carried away by its beauty. The traditional Hebrew chanting and reading, plus the modern touch of English translation, explanation, and English address invariably combined to make an impressive ceremony.

An amusing incident occurred at this hotel wedding. The bride's father came marching in, formally attired, and in evident distress. When he spied my husband, he gave him a pitiful and appealing look, as if to say: "Look what they did to me!" A little while after he clumsily came up to the improvised altar, he discovered that he was on the wrong side. He was given silent but strict orders to get to his right place. For a moment he seemed lost in

a quandary, upset by this new vexing problem. Then summoning up courage he acted with decision. He jumped over the bride's train and landed safely on the other side—which was the right side. It was an unforgettable moment. With expressions of consternation all about him, he dared to smile. It was an achievement worth smiling over. That jump was indeed a classic.

One of the most beautiful *Simchas* we attended was a home celebration of a couple's fortieth wedding anniversary. Not only were all children and grandchildren present, but also the "bride's" mother, a gentle, sweet soul of about ninety, who was living with her daughter. It was a happy family and a touching reunion.

Bar Mitzvah ceremonies at the synagogue were impressive affairs. My husband would write a special speech for each boy. The confirmant would do his Hebrew chanting and deliver his address from the pulpit. He would have the seat next to the rabbi on the pulpit during the services. On the opposite side sat another young man, representing the Junior

Congregaton. He would speak briefly to the *Bar Mitzvah*, bringing greetings from the Junior Congregation. At the conclusion of his talk he would present the *Bar Mitzvah* with a gift from his fellow members. This was usually a gold plated Ten Commandment plaque. Rabbi Bengis would address the boy, and present him with a *Bar Mitzvah* certificate. The ceremony would be concluded with the rabbi giving the *Bar Mitzvah* the blessing. The rabbi would conduct the services with the children joining in, singing certain portions. Privately, the rabbi would also give each *Bar Mitzvah* a small personal gift, usually a miniature gold *Mezuzah*.

My husband was once asked to "officiate" at a mock wedding. This was in lieu of a thirtieth wedding anniversary. The celebration took place at an aristocratic hotel and was a most hilarious affair. A banquet followed the "ceremony." This in turn was followed by a dance. The spirit of humor and good cheer became so prevalent that evening that we were "enmeshed" by it. It was the first and only time in our career that my husband

was seen dancing. First it was the bride who insisted. Then her daughter took him. Finally, all the ladies sought him for a partner. Exhausted, he finally had to give up. All present that night vowed that the rabbi was a "good sport."

I remember one of the many amusing features of that mock ceremony. When the rabbi offered the bridegroom the cup of wine to take a sip, he drank it all. There was none left for the bride. I thought this was a touch of realism brought into this mock wedding. For how many bridegrooms are there in real wedded life who want to take the whole cup of life for themselves? Or how many selfish wives are there who would drink it all, too, if they but had the chance? Perhaps some of the real weddings turn out to be greater mock affairs than this, so-called mock wedding.

Perhaps?

LEADERS

Blessed is the community whose leaders are able and conscientious. Woe to the community whose leaders are incompetent and insincere.

There are several types of community and congregational leaders, each reflecting his distinctive personality and influence.

First, there is the worker. By diligent service and conspicuous achievement, this type wins his place of leadership. He may not possess other qualites, but as a worker and a go-getter many of his shortcomings are overlooked, and his other faults tolerated.

Then there is the man who has usurped leadership because he is a "giver." This type usually has no other qualites to offer beside his wealth.

There is also the type who has neither service nor wealth nor other worthwhile quality to recommend him, but is a so-called leader nevertheless. How does he do it? By *Chuzpah!* The man of this type stops at nothing to

gain his end. He is persistent, and aggressive. He digs the public official or the honest lay leader at every turn. He will hail the coming of a new rabbi or a Hebrew teacher and praise him up to the skies. He will gain their confidence, and later use it against them. He is not happy unless he is on the war path against one or the other. Neither does he despise a feud with the *Chazen* or even the *Shames*. He gloats, too, in setting one against the other. He will attend all meetings, and miss no chance of making his presence felt. He is the loud speaker who usually gets what he wants by his "stick-to-it-iveness." He wears out the opposition. People regularly give way to him, because they do not relish the idea of a fight with him, since insult and abuse are bound to be his weapons and ammunition. With passive resignation, they permit him haughtily to carry on his rampant career of mischief and of destruction. This type is most dangerous Unfortunately he abounds and flourishes.

The high type of leadership combining ability, refinement and intellectual attainments, is naturally the rarest of all. Still this leader

too, is to be found—and often in most unexpected places. Happy is the spiritual leader who has such a man for the president of his congregation. His labors are made easier and his worries are greatly diminished.

The first type, the worker, if he knows his limitations, is not difficult to get along with. He renders service and is entitled to public recognition. When he receives this he is contented. A word of praise or appreciation makes him happy.

Among this group my husband had many staunch friends. There was one man, simple in his ways, who possessed a heart of gold. He was the rabbi's champion, in private as well in public. He would brook no criticism of the rabbi or of any of his sayings or doings. He was the type of the true *Chassid* who can't comprehend that his rabbi should ever be in the wrong.

Another devoted friend was a congregational officer who never failed the rabbi in anything or at any hour. In an emergency or in an unusual case or at a late hour, whenever the necessity arose, I would hear my husband

uttering the familiar words: "Well I guess, I'll have to call Mr. ——."

In the early stage of the rabbi's serious illness, one of the officers demanded that the synagogue be kept in darkness as long as the rabbi remained ill. As soon as Rabbi Bengis heard of this he vigorously protested, insisting that Friday night services and other activities should continue uninterrupted. That leader, in his own way, meant well. He was loyal to the rabbi.

The rich leader, who gives no work but some of his money and his name, is a problem. He is usually very stingy or sparing with his presence, as well as with his work. He is the successful and busy merchant, whose time is so taken up with business matters and personal worries that at best he can give but very little time, and hardly any thought, to the congregation of which he is the president. He is gracious enough to accept, because, as he explains, the office was forced upon him. If he shows up at services Friday night and at some holiday, and condescends to attend a meeting occasionally, he deems it the height of his dis-

charge of office. The lesser lights—but more earnest men of the Board, worry how to meet the expense, what to do about the alarming falling off in membership dues and how to pay the interest on the mortgage. But what is all this to the eminent president whose name adorns the congregational stationery? Does he not pay a larger amount in dues than any other member of the congregation?

This last reason with which the figure-head president consoles himself for his inactivity is also faulty. For even though he may actually contribute more than any other single member, proportionately he does not give enough. In general community affairs where his name and amount are certain to be published, the sum of his contribution exceeds by far anything else he may ever do for his congregation.

There is something even worse than his own negligence. For this type usually keeps away others who are far superior in leadership and in service. It is a human weakness that men don't cherish the idea of labor when others will receive the credit and applause for their efforts. Thus, the losses to congregations that

have such presidents, in money and man power, are very great.

The sooner congregations realize their mistake in making a man president simply for his money the better off they will be. The inactivity, indifference and neglect, and general apathetic attitude on the part of the membership that result, all play havoc with the finances and morale of the congregation. Of course, there are exceptions. I have known presidents who were not only rich and intelligent but also competent and active. But these are rare.

The rabbi's task of maintaining workable—not to say pleasant—relations with these various types of leaders is indeed a most difficult one. The old Talmudic saying that "each man is a world by himself" is nowhere as true as in the case of these men. Each has his own distinctive peculiarities and even eccentricities. It is a rabbi's duty to learn and remember these, or his ministerial efforts are doomed before he even embarks on his rabbinical career. He must learn and remember the likes and dislikes of each leader. He cannot speak to one as he does to another. Not

only the conversation is different, but the very approach varies in each case. One is an ardent Zionist, the next one cares nothing for Palestine. The hobby of one is a Hebrew School, while the other sees no need for such an institution. One centers his activities in the Free Loan Society, another busies himself with the dead and with cemetery affairs. One can see nothing more important than local charity and relief. Another is a national director of a well-known institution for consumptives to which he gives his time and thought. One favors a national hospital, while another chooses an orphan's home. One works for the Jewish National Fund. Another finds his ideal in the Sunday School.

Perhaps the classic example of all of these is the man who allows no opportunity to go by without mentioning and soliciting funds for a certain home for the aged. I have often wondered whether this isn't due to a latent fear that despite his present affluence he may some day have need of the shelter and comfort of such a home!

Many leaders are carried away by their

building ambitions. With some it becomes an obsession. The sad story of overbuilding during the decade immediately preceding the present period of economic stress is but too well known. Many communities are still groaning under the heavy burden. Their imposing synagogues and centers are a grim reminder of the over-zealousness of their leaders.

Quite a few men love these building enterprises as children love to play with toys. It affords them an outlet for their energies. They are sincere about it and take pride in their achievement. There are others, however, who seek only personal glory. The efforts of this type are permeated by the thought that future generations will link his name with that grand edifice which he helped to erect.

The leaders who build modestly to suit local community needs are to be commended.

There are quite a few leaders who might be very useful, but for the fact that they are weak and controlled by "higher ups." For social or business reasons they dare not incur the displeasure of their powerful protectors, whose

whims have to be catered to even at the expense of a troubled conscience.

There are the "high pressure" leaders who flourish because of their bullying tactics. These men usually have political affiliations and connections, besides their aggressiveness, and over-awe the masses with their importance and power.

I do not wish to convey the impression that aggressive and powerful leaders are not desirable. On the contrary, we need more of them. Many of them I admire. But it is the despicable tactics of the degraded type that I have reference to. It must be their way or not at all. Their relentless proscription of unyielding public officials and opposing laymen would make their Roman predecessors blush with shame.

These leaders will help the poor, but exact political allegiance in return. Many who have been aided financially and otherwise dare not rebel. Cutting off credit and patronage, coercion and intimidation, are powerful weapons wielded with vigor by these lords of industry

and of politics. So these high-handed methods are allowed to go on unchallenged.

Many tragedies of broken homes and broken hearts are directly due to the damnable whim or caprice of one of these powerful leaders. The rabbi, the cantor, or the Hebrew teacher has seemed too independent, or has not bowed his head low enough in slavish obeisance and he must go. He is mercilessly uprooted, and, with his family forced to wander again.

The mean practice of paying a man a year or six months' salary in advance—for the length of time his contract still has to run—in order to hasten his departure, is becoming altogether too common. The man's efficiency seldom if ever figures in such a case. He either is too sincere or has dared by his frankness to offend the all powerful master. That public funds are thus used to appease a private grudge, means nothing to the "faithful servant of the community."

The independent rabbi who is challenged by these leaders, or who of his own accord raises an issue involving a principle or democratic practice which has been violated, seldom if

ever emerges the victor from the ensuing conflict. If he makes the mistake of pinning his hopes in the "masses" whose cause he has championed, he is soon disillusioned. While they talk words of sympathy, the leaders act swiftly and decisively. When the smoke of the battle has cleared, the rabbi is usually on his way to try his luck elsewhere.

Some of the people explain their supine failure in such a crisis by frankly saying that they dare not incur the ill will of the leaders with whom they have to continue to live, come in almost daily contact, and, in an emergency, also invoke their favor. The rabbi may be a good friend and a fine fellow, but is not regarded as a permanent resident.

The depression has been a blessing to many communities, inasmuch as it has taken the haughtiness and bullying attitude out of many of these men. They were put back in their places, in retirement and seclusion where they can do no further mischief. Without their money, the magic of their influence and power has vanished. Many are for the first time

learning the meaning of that great and rare Jewish virtue, humility.

There is a ludicrous aspect of incompetent leadership that crops up very often. I remember one case where my husband wrote a brief confirmation class speech for a president and taught it to him. The president usually says a few words, before handing the confirmants their diplomas. The president studied this short speech for nearly three months. All the workers in his plant knew it by heart. He came to the house for rehearsals. And when the dreaded moment came, he began the speech but soon stopped. His memory failed him. He lost himself completely. There he stood, a most tragic figure—till, by persistent prompting, he sufficiently recovered to say, "I thank you!"

Perhaps it was to this type the rabbi was referring when he once said: "There are those who think that they make themselves conspicuous by their absence, when in reality they only make themselves ridiculous by their presence."

There is also the sorry plight of the leader

who is so imperious in public but is the meek lamb at home. I know this type well. I have been in their homes and noted their grief. This man is usually the old immigrant who has prospered here. His wife and children are thoroughly Americanized and out of sympathy with his "old country" tendencies. Thus, his table manners are being constantly corrected. He is reproached for his fondness of "old country" dishes. Being a lover of a good *Chazen*, he dare not put one of these records, so dear to him, on his victrola, but must listen to the jazz music instead.

I have seen this man steal away to attend an old-fashioned *Simchas Torah* party, leaving behind all restraint and table etiquette. And how happy he was! He laughed and sang and seemed like a man transformed.

This man's tragedy is perhaps greater than that of his race. For it is bad enough to be exiles in a foreign land. But it seems to me it is even worse to be an exile in one's own home!

For those leaders who humbly yet effectively have built and developed Jewish community

life and consciousness we have the highest degree of admiration and esteem. They, too, have built institutions. But their building was not limited to mortar and bricks.

Many of these pioneers have lived to see the fruit of their labors. Their years of service are appreciated by the young generation of dignified Jews which they helped to raise. They are happy in the knowledge that their sacrifices have not been in vain.

WOMEN

The work of women is of great importance in the community. In many communities the labors and achievements of "women of valor" surpass the efforts of the men. Often, this becomes so apparent that the masculine leaders will hesitate to undertake any community or congregational project of any magnitude, unless they feel certain of the moral backing and support of the women.

My husband would ask the congregational Board of Directors to appoint two women of the Ladies' Auxiliary as members of the Board. Usually the Auxiliary president and another of her officers would serve. This proved most helpful. By attending Board meetings, these ladies would keep in close touch with congregational needs, and be prepared to present these needs at their own Board or general meetings.

To the congregation, the Ladies Auxiliary is all that the name implies. Often it is even more. I have known Auxiliaries to cover

Hebrew School deficits, raise funds to pay the mortgage interest, contribute a good portion of the general congregational budget, maintain the synagogue office and secretary and render a host of similar valuable services.

During the depression period, especially, the women proved most heroic. They often succeeded where the men failed. Jobs that the men despaired of they gladly undertook, and as a rule they succeeded. Whether it was a bazaar, the raffling of an automobile, the publishing of a congregational year book, or running a kitchen for a week in one of the leading stores downtown—they undertook these tasks courageously, worked faithfully, and secured results.

One Auxiliary president stands out preeminently in my mind. She had served most faithfully and capably for nearly a score of years. Hers was a long record of usefulness and of achievement.

I have often wondered why it is that women who have servants and do no hard work at home will, on the eve of an Auxiliary affair, come to the synagogue and cheerfully cook,

wash dishes, scrub and do other such tasks they would not dream of doing at home. I can ascribe it to one thing only, an earnest and spirited desire to be of service. This readiness to serve is a tribute to their loyalty.

As a rule, the work of the women is earnest and sincere. Feuds and squabbles among the leaders of women's organizations are inevitable, but less frequent than among the men.

In the furtherance of congregational and community projects Rabbi Bengis realized and appreciated the value of the women. He was always prepared to give them full credit and recognition for their labors, as well as encouragement in all their undertakings. His relations with the Auxiliary, its officers and workers were most cordial and pleasant. He attended their meetings, helped in their plans and cheered them in their endeavors.

It is a most happy memory that the Ladies' Auxiliary in one of my husband's early positions was responsible for the gift of an automobile to us. Many other gifts which adorned our home, including floor lamps, articles of

silver and even our radio came from the Auxiliary.

Besides the congregational Auxiliary, there is the Hadassah which is really the Zionist Auxiliary, doing splendid work in sanitation, hospitalization and child welfare in Palestine. The leaders of these organizations, unless they were tactful and clever, would sometimes come into conflict, since one stressed local synagogue work and the other emphasized the national, or Palestine need. The rabbi, who urged the support of both, would now and then be called in as mediator and arbitrator of these disputes. Of late, a better understanding of both needs is being cultivated and developed with beneficial results. Thus in our last position it was nothing new for both organizations to enter into a partnership on a rummage sale proposition or jointly sponsor a picnic. Of course, there will always be the rabid and fanatic extremists who will not listen to reason, but fortunately they are few in number and their influence is not felt.

There is still another organization worthy of note: namely, the Council of Jewish Women.

While giving itself mainly to civic and philanthropic work, it has other worth-while achievements to its credit. I have known small communities in which the Council of Jewish Women maintained a synagogue or a Hebrew School. The Council does one other commendable work, and that is, the aiding of Jewish college students. Its Student Loan Fund and scholarships have proved a blessing to many a Jewish student. I knew a number of young men and women who owed their college education to the Council.

The Council also fosters and aids Jewish boys and girls who have talent for drama and art.

There are other women's organizations, such as Auxiliaries to the Hebrew School, Relief Societies, etc., each doing a definite and specific piece of work. There is scarcely a Jewish woman in the community who is not affiliated with one or more of these organizations. Many women are members of all.

The wise and successful leader of any of these organizations, while belonging to all or most of the others, and contributing to their

support, concentrates her energies on the one which is nearest to her heart.

I have known quite a few able and talented women who made the mistake of attempting to simultaneously lead two organizations. Usually the results are disastrous.

Of course, there are also shirkers among the women as among the men. These women, who are spoiled by ease and luxury, will accept no responsibility and will do no work, but will be the first to criticize those who try. Their energies are usually expended in the two pastimes in which they excel, bridge and gossip.

At these bridge parties many women in public life, the rabbi's wife especially, afford a convenient topic for gossip. Little did I know that while making a sick visit, I was at the time being picked to pieces by these ladies who are past masters at this operation.

Most of my heartaches came from such sources. I might meet one of these women on the street or in a store. I nod to her or civilly greet her, but for her it is not enough. Ever looking for trouble, she broadcasts that I have

ignored her. She will never forget or forgive this, which she considers an insult.

This type is most difficult to get along with. She would never meet me half way. I must come to her, or suffer the unpleasant consequences. She will also criticize whatever I do or wear.

There are too, the women who are social climbers. Their mad chasing after social prestige and keen desire to be in the company of the elite becomes an obsession with them. No sacrifice is too great to achieve this double purpose. Their husbands usually follow them—even if reluctantly. These men have already exhausted every reasonable argument, and have despaired of swerving their determined Amazons, who are bent on conquest. It might even happen that these women are made to feel unwelcome in high places, but this instead of being a deterrent only spurs them on.

In the early days in one of our positions, a woman of influence solicited my friendship, letting me plainly see that she considered her wealth of paramount importance. I replied to

her, "I don't measure friendship by the size of the pocketbook."

I was introduced to another lady, similarly swelled with the importance of her wealth. As there were a number of other families by the same name in town, and fearing that she might be confused with these more humble ones, she hastened to volunteer the information: "I am the rich Mrs. ——."

Our women have the reputation of being most charitable and appropriately so. I recall one striking exception, the wife of a very wealthy man. She was habitually grouchy. Being an officer of the charity organization, she would attend all meetings. Her pet complaint became a mania. There was a poor and almost physically disabled man, who was receiving a meagre weekly allowance. He had a wife and children in Europe, whom he couldn't bring here because of immigration difficulties and because he lacked the means. He would stint himself and send them a portion of his allowance. The lady in question was incensed at this. At every meeting she would give voice to her complaint: "I don't see why our money

should be sent to Europe!" Had this lady ever experienced the pinch of hunger, the misery of want and the sting of poverty, she might have been more tolerant and considerate.

On New Year's eve the socially-mad women will choose the fashionable hotel party in preference to their own Auxiliary homelike celebration. There they will receive and swallow a goodly portion of abuse and insult, but they are willing to pay even this price.

What is worse is that these women often infect their children with this harmful and distorted notion of superiority. Other children naturally resent this and trouble ensues. If the afflicted child is bright and intelligent he later discards his mother's teaching. When they reach this stage, these children are as a rule most sociable and democratic.

When these mothers think that the children of their congregation are not good enough company for their children, or below their own social standard, they hit upon the plan of sending them to the Sunday School of the reform temple. But here they are often disappointed —for these children whose company they wish

their own children to avoid, have mothers who reason and plan similarly—with the result that instead of meeting these children at their own synagogue they meet them at the reform temple!

On the whole, the worth and service of energetic and conscientious women in the community cannot be overestimated. They frequently set the pace for the men workers, inspiring them to greater efforts and achievements by their own heroic example. Their beneficial influence lends color to and shapes the character of many a community.

I have visited in small communities where there are only a handful of Jews, far removed from any Jewish center. In these remote places I have seen a Jewish organization or school for Jewish children, a spark of Jewish life tenderly fostered and bravely kept alive by a few devoted daughters of Israel!

It is women of this type who brought much joy to our hearts. Our association and comradeship with them in a common cause constituted, in the midst of our ministerial trials and labors, a source of solace for which we shall always be grateful.

CHILDREN

The most enjoyable part of our work was that which brought us in close touch with the children. Many were the happy hours spent in their company. Stirring and sacred are the memories which our relations with children bring back to mind.

Being by nature fond of children, and not blessed with any of our own, we readily bestowed our love on the children of our congregation. And of these there were many who both merited and reciprocated this affection. With their quick sense of perception the children eagerly responded to our friendliness.

My husband, however, held first place in their hearts. And this was so not only because he was with them more, but because his personality always seemed to radiate that genuine cheer and unassumed affability that children love so well. He had that something which goes straight to a child's heart and remains there.

I remember how a little girl of about five,

accustomed to receiving the rabbi's kiss each Sunday morning at Sunday School, came home sick and crying, because the rabbi failed to give her the regular kiss that morning. The regrettable failure was due to an unexpected business meeting which kept the rabbi busy all that morning. This was difficult to explain to the young lady, however. A visit to her home was necessary. A belated but welcome kiss appeased her, and she was happy once more.

I recall another incident. A young girl, of similar age, kept calling for Rabbi Bengis all through the night. Through her tears and fever she cried for the rabbi, till he finally came. His presence helped to subside both the tears and the fever.

Incidents of this kind were numerous. The ladies would often tease me about this, asking whether the charm of the rabbi was limited to young ladies of the age of five only.

My husband possesses a splendid memory. In addition to this he cultivated the faculty for remembering children's first names till it was almost uncanny. He would urge this upon me also, pointing out how valuable this ability was.

The truth of this was very often brought out when I saw the intimate bond this practice helped to establish with the children. And it was also of practical advantage, for when a child is thus called or referred to in the presence of the parent, there is a friendliness cemented between the rabbi and the parent that is not to be underestimated.

Rabbi Bengis used to emphasize to me the importance of such little things.

Sometimes it was through children that delinquent parents would be brought to the synagogue. Of course, parents always will come to see their children perform. Where are the parents who do not consider their child an artist, if not a genius?

Children's programs are always bound to attract a good crowd. They are frequently offered with as large a number of children participating as possible.

In most communities it is an unwritten law to have at least one elaborate children's program during the year, usually during the *Chanukah* season. As a rule, the feature of

the program is a play. Songs and recitations, round out the program.

The preparation of the program, especially the play, would consume a great deal of time. As this time usually would be during Hebrew School hours, and children, chiefly Hebrew School students, a good deal of valuable and already too limited Hebrew School time would be wasted. The conscientious rabbi and sincere Hebrew School teacher are powerless, and reluctantly give way to the popular demand, especially when it is pointed out to them that the children's demonstration is also to be a Hebrew School benefit. Rabbi Bengis would request the Sunday School staff to take a leading part in this work, and rehearsals would be arranged in the evening at the teacher's home. So that all that would be left for the Hebrew School would be the Hebrew parts and only the last two weeks before the affair would Hebrew School time be infringed upon.

My husband was always fortunate in securing the active help of the Sunday School staff in this as well as in similar matters.

I said that parents would sometimes be

brought to the synagogue by their children. I recall one remarkable case. The father in question not only returned to the synagogue, but became a most active and valuable worker. The story is as follows:

During *Chanukah* week it was Rabbi Bengis's custom to give the children in Hebrew School and Sunday School candles to take home. Explaining the Feast of Lights and the use of the candles, he would ask that the candles given them be lit in their homes. The boy in question took the matter very seriously. His father was a rabid atheist of the old school who held aloof from all religious matters. It was the combined insistence of mother and child that made possible the boy's Hebrew School attendance. He brought the candles home and asked his father to light them. The father at first refused. But the boy pressed his plea till the father could resist no longer. With the lighting of the candles that *Chanukah* night, the old yearning for Jewish atmosphere, that for so many years had been stifled, was rekindled in that father's heart. He began visiting the synagogue and to show interest in com-

munity affairs. He is now an ardent and energetic worker.

Especially in such matters a child's plea will not be denied. I also recall overhearing an argument between a woman and her young son on the street. It was on a Saturday morning. The mother was attempting to persuade the boy to go for his music lesson, while he begged to go to children's services instead. His earnestness and tears finally gave him the triumph, and he joyfully ran off to the synagogue.

Rabbi Bengis would exercise the greatest patience in dealing with children. He was their friend, adviser, and helper. They came to him with their troubles and confidences. He had a word of cheer for them all. His helping hand was not withheld from them.

How they used to love to come to our house to rehearse their speeches! This was especially true of the *Bar Mitzvah* boys.

When Rabbi Bengis was working in arranging the children's services, the boy who was to act as cantor came to the house daily for over a month to learn the traditional chant of the Sabbath eve services. He had a beautiful

voice, and on the momentous evening covered himself with glory. The rabbi was happy that his labors had not been in vain.

Children in distress with their school work also came to the rabbi for help. He gladly gave it. English and Latin students were frequent visitors. I, too, had a share in this work. We enjoyed it most thoroughly.

At the synagogue, the children were always made to feel welcome. The front section was reserved for them at all services.

The Junior Congregation played an important part in the life of the synagogue. The members, composed largely of Hebrew School children, were trained in the ritual and in the conduct of services, etc. Their meetings and activities would also be useful for these future congregational leaders.

They had their own *Chazanim,* readers of the *Torah, etc.* In my husband's position they even had their own little *Torah.* This was the gift of a generous member, an appropriate memorial to his mother, fittingly inscribed in gold on the mantle. The *Siyum* ceremony netted the Hebrew School a handsome sum.

Contrary to the practice, in vogue in many communities, of holding these children's services in the basement of the synagogue, or in the Hebrew School building, Rabbi Bengis preferred to hold these services in the synagogue proper. Even before the main services were over the children were already in the front section, their officers on the pulpit, and their banner proudly displayed from the speaker's stand. No sooner were the senior services over than the children struck up their *Adon Olom*. It seemed as though I was living through the ecstasy of feeling the continuity of Jewish life, with the admirable blending of the old and the new. Another link in the golden chain of Jewish immortal history appeared to be forged by those children, who continued where their elders left off. And we were privileged not only to witness this but to have part in the very process. It was a grand sight and a glorious feeling!

Rabbi Bengis would speak briefly during the children's services, seldom more than ten minutes. On special occasions, Junior Congregation members would speak. Often, following

the services, the mother of one of the officers acted as hostess to all members at a fine party, with tables sumptuously prepared in the vestry room. The Junior Congregation would be in charge of at least one Friday night service during the year, and also at a special children's service on *Yom Kippur* afternoon.

Besides our interest in many children organizations, I used to sponsor a girls' Young Judaea Club, and derived much pleasure from this work. It is surprising to learn of the organization and administrative ability, efficiency and talent of many of our youngsters. While doing this work, we found and brought to light many such boys and girls, who are now active and responsible leaders in their community. We are glad to have had a share in their training and development.

My requests from these children for charity and personal service were always warmly answered. Visiting sick children at their homes or at the hospital and crippled children at the local clinic, etc., was a duty always gladly performed.

I recall, too, how the local manager of a

movie house agreed to allow our Hebrew School children a free matinee showing of "The Jazz Singer." My husband, the Hebrew School teacher and myself marched at the head of a troop of a hundred or more children. The traffic lights were disregarded, as the genial cop saw us safely across the busy street.

Some of our most touching experiences with children occurred during my husband's recent illness. Rabbi Bengis still has in his possession letters from children which he treasures.

One day, when his condition was very serious, two little girls came to our house. With tears in their eyes they pleaded with me. "But, Mrs. Bengis," they exhorted me, "we don't want to talk to him or disturb him, but only to look at him!" Could I refuse? I led them to the threshold of the rabbi's room. They held their breath. As the rabbi faintly smiled, they withdrew on tiptoes. They told me later that they prayed and prayed that night for their dear rabbi and friend.

Another little girl made her mother take her out to the country to pick flowers for the rabbi. Those obtained from the florist were not good

enough. The rabbi had spoken about service and the "personal touch." She was going to carry this out now. She came. My husband rewarded her with a kiss. She left beaming with joy.

As we were leaving one of our early positions, all the children came to the station to see us off. Some of them actually ran after the train. That picture will never be erased from our minds.

To be at once teacher and confidant, guide and friend, leader and comrade—all this and more made up our relations with the children. The rabbi was gentle yet firm. While he might play ball with the children outside, in the synagogue and in the classroom the child must know his place.

Our happiest moments were those spent with the children. We knew that their friendship was sincere and their affection genuine. Free from the contamination of deception and intrigue, their company served as a wholesome restorative. From our continued relations with them we also derived a unique feeling and spirit of youth which was priceless.

Gone are those happy moments, perhaps never to return. But the love of countless children lives in our hearts. This love we hold sacred. It is our merited reward, and sufficient recompense for all our suffering.

COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

In the community there is always something going on. Our attention and participation are required. The only lull there is in community endeavor is during the hot summer months. The community season of activity is ushered in with the High Holidays in the fall and continues to *Shevuos*. Of course, there is an abatement in the spring.

A great deal of energy is consumed by campaigns. The Charity Federation and the Palestine annual campaigns head the list. Most of the other educational and social service institutions, including national, Palestinian and European, are provided for by the Federation. This is a recent development. Others carry on their work through representatives sent for the purpose, with the cooperation of local committees.

In the big campaign, committee meetings, luncheons, banquets, and mass meetings are generously indulged in. At the banquet or mass meeting, initiating the campaign, a prom-

inent out-of-town speaker is usually the guest of honor.

In many cities, the Federation is now made part of the general Community Chest. To the success of this campaign, the Jewish community contributes not only its full share in money, but also its most able workers and all its facilities. Frequently, a Jewish chairman is to be found heading the campaign. One or two Jewish representatives are also officers of the administrative body. The spirit of cooperation and good will thus generated is commendable. Although at times it is difficult to explain the Jewish way of charity, especially in contributing to out-of-town institutions, yet on the whole the relations between the Community Chest and the Jewish Federation are most friendly.

More and more of the social, educational and relief service, both in the United States and abroad, is being included within the scope of the Federation. Social Service Federation, Jewish Philanthropies, etc., are more recent names of the Charity Federation. This expansion has become necessary to conserve energy,

save expense, and avoid duplication. The tendency seems to be toward the *Kehillah* idea. The local Hebrew School, originally excluded from the Federation budget, on the ground that it is not a charity institution, is lately being included in some communities, as are the Palestine and Joint Distribution Committee Campaigns. An intelligent community consciousness is in evidence, and coming into its own. A central committee or council for the purpose of sanctioning organization affairs and clearing of dates to avoid confusion is also being set up in some communities.

In scattered places, Jewish courts of arbitration are also to be found. Rabbi Bengis has participated in such settling of disputes. His committee's findings and decisions were always accepted and honored. Community discipline and authority, when universally established and accepted, will go far toward building a dignified and healthy Jewish community life.

Cultural activities are sponsored by the Jewish Community Center or Y. M. H. A., as the case may be. Other organizations also

have their cultural meetings, but the Center or Y carries on this work on a larger scale. Lecturers and musical artists are frequently brought to the community at large by these organizations. Strictly Jewish cultural activities are confined to the individual organizations and smaller groups. This work however, is very elementary and limited in its scope.

Some communities possess fairly creditable, Jewish libraries, including not only English Judaica, but also Yiddish and Hebrew books and magazines. These libraries are proving worthwhile, are popular, and well patronized.

Though Rabbi Bengis was active in community affairs and occasionally appeared at non-Jewish programs, he never went to the extreme, as some do, of working in outside matters to the extent of neglecting his own congregation. His congregation and people were his first concern.

It was customary for the rabbi to speak before each Jewish organization at least once a year. He made these rounds regularly. Before many of these, he would have to appear more often, as circumstances required.

The rabbi has to be prepared for all emergencies. Once Rabbi Bengis was called to deliver a radio address, and was given less than an hour's notice. As it was for the benefit of the Community Chest, during its campaign, he accepted. He made his notes in the street car on the way down. His speech turned out to be very successful.

In the community where my husband was the senior rabbi in length of service, he had an arrangement with the superintendent of Schools, whereby Jewish children were excused from school on all Jewish holidays. In the fall a complete list of all Jewish holidays for the year with dates would be furnished by the rabbi. The principals would be instructed accordingly.

Jewish children who failed to take advantage of this liberty were often ridiculed and derided by their gentile classmates.

Before the misfortune of my husband's illness, I used to go around the house singing as I worked. My friends would tell me I had a good voice. Somehow, I did not like to sing

in public. Only once did I sing publicly; it was at a benefit affair.

My public speaking experiences were also limited. The rabbi used to say jokingly that while he does the speaking in public I do it at home.

Once he said that his most successful sermon was preached to an audience of one—and that my "yes" was a most happy benediction.

I did speak from the pulpit once. It was on a Saturday morning, the occasion being Hadassah Sabbath.

Rabbi Bengis was very active in Zionist affairs. At thirty, he was the president of the oldest state Zionist organization in the country. For a number of years he was a member of the National Executive Committee of the Zionist Organization of America. Imbued with the Zionist ideal, and being an eloquent and effective speaker, he was sought far and wide as a Zionist speaker. He is a veteran campaigner, having led, and materially aided, many a Zionist campaign "over the top." He also has to his credit the organization of a number of

Zionist districts. With the aid of a number of others, including his Hebrew School teacher friend, he also helped to enliven and stimulate the outlying Jewish communities by his indomitable spirit and Jewish song. How he used to thrill at the prospect of a coming Zionist meeting or a conference! The state convention was the supreme moment. All pent-up Jewish emotions were given full play. A *Chassidic* exultation of unalloyed joy permeated the gathering. These Zionist gatherings are unforgettable.

There was one little community in particular where the rabbi and other Zionists loved to visit. At least one conference a year used to take place there. Though but a handful of brave Jewish souls, they were one hundred per centers in every Jewish cause and enterprise. Especially was this true in Zionist matters.

Arriving there for a conference, we would be met and taken to the hotel, scene of the meeting. A sumptuous lunch awaited us. The local Jewish residents would vie with one another in taking delegates home. An afternoon session followed. Then another meal

and in the evening the mass meeting would be held. Following this meeting we would proceed to the home of the local Zionist leader, a most lovable gentleman. His wife had already prepared for our coming. No banquet was ever enjoyed as that midnight supper, at that large table. They sang and reveled till the early hours of the morning.

Most of the Jewish Community was crowded into that room, and together with the delegates inspired by the Jewish song, all seemed transported to the land of dreams and of joy! Last time my husband spoke of these sessions, I detected a tear in his eye.

The reform rabbi of this community was the dean of the rabbis of the state. He was a venerable and sympathetic gentleman of the old school, scholarly and human. At a District B'nai B'rith Convention, at a social function of which the delegates were fed ham sandwiches, he rose to protest on the floor of the convention with the following introductory allusion to himself: "I am one of those peculiar reform rabbis who do not eat ham!"

We had one president whose department

store was extensively patronized by the Mexican population of that district. On Christmas it was his custom to be their host at a monster party, entertainment, and feast. Rabbi Bengis attended one of these celebrations. His brief address was listened to most attentively and respectfully. He thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

Another president, owner of the largest department store in town, treated all the poor of the city, black and white alike, to a Thanksgiving turkey dinner. In each case the expense ran up into the thousands. It was good business. It was also a fine community gesture.

About ten years ago the president of a district organization conferred upon Rabbi Bengis the honor of appointing him the essayist for the coming convention. He was the first non-reform rabbi to be thus honored. But in the interim the rabbi was "guilty" of mentioning Palestine in an address at the local temple. The occasion was the state convention of the Council of Jewish Women. Immediately after, a letter came from the district president

cautioning my husband against any "propaganda" in his forthcoming essay at the convention. By propaganda was obviously meant Zionism or Palestine. Rabbi Bengis had already announced his subject to the chairman of the Cultural Advancement Committee as "Jewish Youth." When this insinuating letter arrived, Rabbi Bengis promptly replied that he did not care for honors with strings attached. His stand stirred up considerable comment among local leaders of the organization. Pressure was exerted to make him change his mind. But he was firm in this as in other matters where principle is involved.

It must be borne in mind that this was over ten years ago, when controversies and conflicts over Zionism, were keen, and sometimes bitter. Conditions have changed since. There are none today who care to label themselves as anti-Zionists. Those who still call themselves non-Zionists are co-operating in Palestine upbuilding work through the medium of the Jewish Agency which includes all branches of Jewry.

Almost every Jewish community of any size

has its weekly paper. Rabbi Bengis edited one of these for a number of years with much success. Many of his articles and editorials were reprinted in magazines, as far off as in China! His clear and vigorous expression on Jewish matters won him high praise and as harsh criticism. Journalism was his hobby and proved to be of great help in his other work.

The local press is, as a rule, very generous and considerate. Holiday stories and outstanding Jewish community happenings would be supplied to them by my husband regularly. One city editor once remarked that the rabbi was a born news writer. His stories were to the point, clear and concise, containing no unnecessary detail.

About eleven years ago Rabbi Bengis also founded and edited a Zionist monthly for a brief period. Through an unfortunate and regrettable business alliance this promising publication went under. My husband and three associates suffered a considerable financial loss.

My husband is the proud possessor of a

Jewish National Fund Golden Book Certificate which is given only for outstanding and meritorious Zionist service. This honor was conferred on him at the State Convention by the Zionists of the district where he had formerly been the rabbi.

Rabbi Bengis also holds the distinction of being recalled to a former position.

The banquet given us by the congregation which we were leaving, the many gifts presented to us, the touching words of farewell, nearly all our friends accompanying us from the banquet hall to the train: all this left a lasting impression.

I was bedecked with flowers that night. I was also unexpectedly called on to make a speech. I only remember that I paid tribute to my mother.

My husband took away that night another cherished prize from that memorable banquet. This was a document, in the form of a resolution, presented by the local Hadassah making him a life member of their chapter.

Another tribute to Rabbi Bengis was the banquet given in his honor by his congregation

and local Zionists on the occasion of his election to the State Zionist presidency.

In his relations with other rabbis, my husband was always kind and considerate. The visiting rabbi would be shown every courtesy and hospitality. He would be afforded every opportunity to present his message favorably. His talent and ability would receive commendable mention, and his introduction to the congregation would be warm and sympathetic. My husband was never jealous of a colleague. He was first to recognize and applaud his friend's powers and success.

In this connection I recall how Rabbi Bengis once expounded that famous verse, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Literally, this dictum is most difficult to follow. It seems contrary to that hard rule of human nature. But when you insert the relative pronoun which in Hebrew is sometimes understood, the new meaning becomes clear. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor WHO is like thyself," becomes easier to understand. If every rabbi were as considerate of his colleague as of himself—and the same can be applied to all professions—what a wonderful code of ethics we would have!

JEWISH EDUCATION

The matter of Jewish education constitutes a most vital and perplexing problem.

The Hebrew School, considered the most important educational institution, affords children but a limited religious education. Its elementary program, abbreviated period of study, and short duration, are for the average child inadequate for the acquisition of an intelligent appreciation of things Jewish. Yet, despite these shortcomings, in many communities it remains the best and usually the only medium for teaching Jewish children.

A number of Hebrew Schools in the country are model institutions. They have an advanced and carefully prepared curriculum, with most competent educational directors. The students and parents take this Hebrew School very seriously. Graduates of such an institution know Hebrew rather thoroughly, and have a knowledge of Jewish life. But these model schools are altogether too few.

There are probably not a dozen of them in the entire country.

Yet the average Hebrew School has much to its credit. Not only does it give the child whatever Jewish knowledge it can impart, but what is perhaps as important, it affords Jewish children an opportunity of meeting together in a Jewish atmosphere. In communities where the Jewish child spends most of his time in a non-Jewish environment, this is very important. And where the home isn't much Jewish, the Hebrew School is even more important.

The Jewish School in the smaller community has many handicaps. First, there is the non-Jewish environment that has to be counteracted. The child's energies are used up during his day at public school. Then there is the paradox of religious teaching and the child's failure to see these things practiced at home. A child may be told of the beauties of the Sabbath and its observance, but its disregard by his parents at home brings confusion to his mind. These are the basic difficulties.

The Hebrew School possesses very little if any authority. Children stay away from classes

for the least excuse. A bad pupil will sometimes be allowed to demoralize the entire class or school, but he must be tolerated, because his parent is an officer or a large contributor. I overheard a child once tell the Hebrew teacher, "You can't tell me anything; my father is a member of the Board!"

I believe it was this unhealthy condition and the desire to have an independent Hebrew School that prompted a number of enterprising men of vision to establish a Hebrew School Endowment Fund in one of my husband's positions. They appropriately named it after the venerable Hebrew School president, who had given nearly half a century of his life to the Hebrew School and to other Jewish endeavors in the community. He is lovingly called the "Daddy" of the community. This honor, coming to him in his old age, is a fitting tribute to a useful and rich life of service.

From a modest beginning about eight years ago, this Endowment Fund now exceeds $20,000. The principal is never to be used. Its income is to be used only after a lapse of ten years since its organization.

Bequests to the Fund by leaders and men of affairs in the community are most generous. Names of donors are inscribed in a most beautiful Golden Book, specially imported from Palestine at great cost for this purpose. Many also take out insurance policies, designating the Fund beneficiary.

The directors of the Fund are already making elaborate plans for improved Hebrew School facilities and for an enlarged program. Kindergarten classes and similar projects will be included.

The idea is worthy of the thought and consideration of other progressive community leaders.

The Sunday School is next in importance. Because it is more convenient, the Sunday School is much more popular than the Hebrew School. Two, three, and even four times as many children attend Sunday School as Hebrew School. The Sunday School, also, accommodates kindergarten classes.

Since the Sunday School is so popular it must not be treated too lightly or disregarded, as some Hebrew School enthusiasts try to do.

The meeting with other Jewish children and the Jewish environment are important factors to be considered. Since this opportunity comes to most of these children but once a week, the most should be made of it.

The session consists of an hour to an hour and a half of study, followed by an assembly program. Rabbi Bengis utilized the assembly not only for a brief Jewish message, or program, but also for the singing of Yiddish and Hebrew folk songs. This was popular with the children. Many a Jewish home re-echoed with these songs during the week.

The general Sunday School curriculum consists of study of Jewish history and religion. History used to be limited to the Biblical period. This is now being expanded to include every period of Jewish history up to the present. Current Jewish events are discussed in the higher classes. The senior pupils are also required to read at least two books of Jewish interest during the term and write reports on these. The list to choose from is made up by the rabbi. Scrap books of Jewish interest are made by all pupils. Prizes are given for

the best ones at the end of the term. Other prizes offered are for holiday essays, attendance, synagogue attendance and scholarship.

It is not easy to secure a competent Sunday School staff. Rabbi Bengis used to train his teachers as much as possible. They are, as a rule, willing and glad to cooperate. There are many talented young women among the teachers. Their holiday and assembly programs are original and often ingenious. The confirmation teacher in our last position was a Trojan for work, capable and pleasant, and an asset to the school.

There is a dearth of first class Sunday School texts. The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the reform group, are advanced in this, since they have a system of organization and uniform texts. Orthodox and Conservative Sunday Schools grope their own individual way, using a variety of texts and methods.

In the larger communities the Yiddish School is to be found. It is sponsored by the radical Yiddish loving element. It omits the religious aspect from its curriculum, stressing

the Yiddish language and literature. The traditional and national element of the holidays and of Jewish life is fostered and observed. Their teachers are well trained and competent.

The sponsors of these schools are earnest and hard working. Being a minority group, they often have to strain themselves to the limit to maintain the existence of their school.

When a boy becomes *Bar Mitzvah* his Hebrew School career is usually brought to an end. Rabbi Bengis tried various methods of continuing the Jewish studies of these boys. He was successful to some extent. The method he found best was to organize these boys into a High School Class—the high sounding name being important—to meet twice a week. He would personally conduct this class.

Similarly in the Sunday School, post confirmation classes and a High School Division were organized. I am glad to record that in our last position, children of sixteen and seventeen were still found on our Sunday School roll.

Efforts at adult education met with varied degrees of success. An adult Sunday School

class flourished in our last position till the rabbi's illness forced its suspension. His series of lectures on "The Jewish Prophets" before this class was enthusiastically received.

Bible classes for the women are in vogue. In our last community, a joint class, sponsored by the Hadassah and Auxiliary cultural committees, was most successful. This class met once a week at the Y. M. H. A. Rabbi Bengis gave an interesting course on "Jewish Customs." Jewish historical topics were presented by the Hebrew teacher and another scholarly layman.

Adult Jewish education is being pondered in many communities. Night classes called by such names as "College of Jewish Studies" are coming into being. There seems to be a greater desire for Jewish learning and Jewish knowledge.

The parochial school system is another subject under serious discussion in many places.

Who knows but that in time America may become a Jewish center of learning? What was possible in Babylonia should not be impossible in America. There are potentialities.

Already there exist several thriving Yeshivahs, a Yeshivah College, and other institutions of higher Jewish learning. The traditional and undying love of learning of the "People of the Book" is an impulse that still lives in many Jewish hearts. No sacrifices are too great for the sake of *Torah*.

Who can fathom the genius of our people or foretell its destiny?

OUR GENTILE NEIGHBORS

When my gentile neighbor tells me, "If only all Jews were like you!" he intends this as a compliment. Little does he realize that his words carry a stinging insult. For in attempting to flatter me at the expense of my people he offends both.

We have been addressed with this deceptive formula by doctors, ministers, and other intelligent gentiles who should have known better.

Perhaps this typifies the tolerant and indulgent attitude of the majority of our gentile friends. I believe that most Christians, in their heart of hearts have always blamed us for the crucifixion of Jesus, and have never forgiven us for our persistent refusal to accept Jesus as the Messiah. As long as the doctrine of our supposed guilt is accepted as historic fact by enlightened Christians, there is bound to be hatred of the Jew. And as long as devout Christians regard our refusal to be converted as a grave error and unpardonable sin, prejudice and anti-Semitism will flourish.

With all our talk of good will and with all our efforts at fellowship, we must go to the root of the matter if we are to accomplish anything. The gentile attitude toward the Jew must be revised. The gentile must learn that Jewish history did not end with the destruction of the Temple. That the Dispersion is divine vengeance for our refusal to accept Jesus, and that only when we "see the light" will our salvation come, are doctrines that need revision and correction. They should further realize that Jewish life and existence mean more than a mummified testimony to the "glorious truth of Christianity."

On the other hand, our gentile neighbors who profess friendship and good will must learn that we are a people not only with a past, but with a present, and with aspirations for a future. We have lived and survived since the Dispersion not because of a dogma or merely to satisfy a Christian doctrine, but because we had the determination and the power and ability to adjust ourselves to life. So we have lived and survived despite all persecutions. We

have even an exile language and literature and other national creations to our credit.

The zealous Christian cannot free himself from the missionary urge. He will often deceive a rabbi or an unsuspecting Jewish congregation. He will come in the guise of a "Jewish Christian", a Bible Student, etc. He will begin by praising the Jewish people and inevitably conclude by deploring our failure to "see the light" and urging our conversion. My husband was fooled a number of times this way in his early ministry. I think such tactics are unethical and unfair. The *Meshumed*, who comes thus disguised, is most disgusting.

The communities in which we served contained one or more colleges. We were also not distant from the State Universities. We had opportunities to form contacts and acquaintances with Jewish students. We found that many of these Jewish students came by the hundreds from New York and other large communities. And these colleges and universities were over a thousand miles from New York! What prompted these Jewish students to go so far from home? Some told us that material

reasons were responsible. Others said that there were better opportunities for their scholarship to be recognized in these remote schools. But the great majority insisted that they had difficulty in entering the eastern college or university. They attributed this to racial and religious discrimination.

It is a known fact that many gentile firms refuse to employ Jewish help. I know of a number of these chain stores and others, all well patronized by our people!

I must here relate a most unusual incident. I was in need of a girl to do light housework, and inserted an ad in the local paper. A girl called on the phone, and seemed from her conversation to qualify. I asked her to come over. Suddenly she asked, "Are you Jewish?" To my reply in the affirmative she said, "I am sorry I can't consider the position!" I had heard of employers refusing Jewish help, but to have a girl in need of work refuse a Jewish employer was a novel experience. I sat for a long time at that 'phone, in silence, pondering on the intricacies of anti-Semitism.

Many gentiles, if they do not hate us, do not

understand us and regard us as a most peculiar people. It was nothing new for gentiles to 'phone us asking whether they would be permitted to attend services at the synagogue. Others think they dare not even enter the synagogue. And many there are who think we hold secret services and practice mysterious rites. These things were told to me by some in confidential tones. Others confessed these fears, and implored us, as friends, to enlighten them.

The gentile who forgets religious differences —and there are many of this class too—and considers us as human beings, can be very agreeable and sympathetic. We have known a good many of these. Some have remained loyal friends to this day. There was one man in particular who was most kind to us and whose many considerate and friendly acts we shall never forget.

During my husband's illness our gentile neighbors were not only interested, but very thoughtful in many ways. Several non-Jewish doctors who had occasion to examine or attend

Rabbi Bengis since his illness have proved most sympathetic and kind.

Kol Nidre services attract a large gentile audience. Other unusual synagogue services find many gentiles in attendance. Zionist and Jewish cultural meetings are also attended by gentiles, especially when a noted speaker is announced. There seems to be a desire to learn more of things Jewish. Perhaps the fact that we are not a missionary people, and do not go much out of our way to enlighten the intelligent and interested gentile in things Jewish, works to our detriment more than we would think.

I have seldom if ever, known a gentile speaker from a Jewish platform to fail to utter the customary words of praise, or to enumerate the list of Jewish notables.

Even the general, who was commander of the local military post and who delivered a rather fine *Chanukah* address from the synagogue over the radio on "The Jew as a Soldier," was not free from this.

I have heard a number of gentile ministers who visited Palestine lecture about their ex-

periences and observations in the Holy Land. As a rule they were disappointing. They saw only the Biblical Palestine and that only of the New Testament to which they made frequent allusions. They failed to see the Jewish pioneers, Jewish colonies, the Hebrew University, the modern Jewish city, the regenerated Palestine that was throbbing with life. Looking at ruins, they saw only the desolate Palestine of the past.

Some were even guilty of bringing in the Christian missionary idea in their talk.

Once, a gentile minister had the courage to ask a Jewish fraternal convention, why he never hears a Jew, or any group of Jews, sing Jewish songs in the open. He could not understand this suppression of emotion.

He was perhaps enlightened in private later. It is difficult for the non-Jewish mind to grasp the fact that this condition is due to an abnormal exile psychology which generates fear and shackles the soul.

In Palestine today the Jew is free and mass holiday celebrations with unrestrained song are being revived.

Among Rabbi Bengis's acquaintances was a negro minister. He not only had a good idea of things Jewish but knew Hebrew well. They spent many hours together.

My husband's public duties often took him to a non-Jewish luncheon or banquet. If questioned, he would promptly and frankly give the reason for his failure to eat. I believe he was more respected both for his observance of the dietary laws and for not inventing other excuses.

Gentile contributions to Jewish causes were frequent. This was especially true in building enterprises. The building of a new synagogue is a big event in the community, and many non-Jewish gifts are recorded. I know of one synagogue built in a small town, the entire lumber material of which was donated by a generous gentile friend.

When Rabbi Bengis suffered a severe heart attack and was lying dangerously ill, I came into the kitchen and found our colored girl on her knees in prayer. As she rose, she turned to me with tears in her eyes and said, "I, love Rabbi Bengis too!"

In this day of Hitlerism, with our own country not entirely free from the infection, the Jew in America certainly appreciates the value of true gentile brotherliness and co-operation. But having experienced disillusionment and disappointment we have grown more cautious. We are learning to become more discerning. We are no longer ready to bestow our confidence and praise on any and all who would mislead us by insidious flattery. The gruesome menace from Germany has taught us to be less hysterical and more self-possessed. Even if with anxious hearts, yet with calm and tempered mind we can plan our defence against the menace with dignity and with effectiveness—and above all with concerted effort.

The heroic men and women of America who have come to our defence are the representatives of the true America of which we have always been proud. Their support has proved encouraging and invigorating. It more than makes up for the few misguided bigots who always crop up at such a period.

We hope that even these will soon pass, and that America will remain true to its tradition of liberty and of democratic ideals.

CONCLUSION

I trust that the reader has derived some pleasure and benefit from my writing. I have tried to be honest throughout.

It is with a feeling of pride that I look back upon those years of our manifold labors. For no one can say that we ever shirked any duty. In fact, had my husband followed the doctor's orders and eased up in his work, he might have been a well man today. Though already ill, he walked to the other part of town to officiate at the old synagogue! With a terrific pain in his heart, he continued to preach his sermon and did not quit till he collapsed and had to be brought home.

With all our labor and toil, a thoughtless person would sometimes say, "What do a rabbi and his wife have to do, anyway?"

The reader is already acquainted with the difficulty of our task. Our every step was watched. We were criticized at every turn, yet we carried on. Often, those whom we considered friends would suddenly turn against

us. The reason might be some social omission or something equally trivial. This would always prove a hard blow. Why should people be so heartless? Why should sensible and responsible men and women, formerly our admirers and friends, become our enemies and desire to uproot us for some little thing which among true friends should readily be overlooked? By these and many others we would be held in high esteem, until one of us committed some inevitable error. Then all our good deeds were forgotten and our mistake magnified and made an issue of. Is this the right way? Are we not human, and liable to error? Must our years of labor and usefulness be taken for granted, or even forgotten, because we make some human mistake?

Sometimes I wondered whether we were considered human at all. How many would show us kindness or consideration if it weren't for my husband's title, and for the position we occupied in the community?

Those friends who proved themselves steadfast and true are the dearer to us because of our many disillusionments. They who re-

mained devoted since my husband's illness and since the leaving of our last position are the ones that matter. To them we offer our hearts overflowing with gratitude and love. They have made us feel that we are not alone in our struggle to regain my husband's health.

Even now, Rabbi Bengis does not complain. He still thinks of others and not of himself. It is the thought of some day being able to resume his cherished work, that gives him strength and courage to carry on the battle.

This hope sustains us both. God grant its fulfilment!

GLOSSARY

Adon Olom—Introductory and concluding Sabbath hymn Literal meaning, master of the world

Am-Haaretz—The ignorant

Badchan—Minstrel

Bar Mitzvah—Jewish boy at age of thirteen, assuming religious obligations (Literally, Son of Commandment)

B'nai B'rith—One of largest Jewish fraternal orders (Literally, Sons of the Covenant)

Briss—Circumcision ceremony

Chanukah—Feast of Lights, commemorating Maccabean victory

Chassidic—Pious, divinely exalted (*chassid,* devoted follower)

Chazen—Cantor (im=plural)

Chazokeh—Traditional right, standing privilege

Cheder—Hebrew School (Literally, room)

Chupah—Marriage Canopy

Chuzpah—"Cheek," nerve

Davening—Leading of services

Kaddish—Mourner's prayer

Kehillah—Organized and disciplined community

Kesubah—Hebrew marriage certificate

Kiddush—Sanctification, benediction chanted over cup of wine Sabbaths and holidays in synagogue and home

Kol Nidre—Famous Atonement Eve synagogue humn

Mazel-tov—Form of greeting addressed to a Simcha celebrant)Literal meaning, good luck)

Megillah—Literally, scroll; applied to Book of Esther, read in Synagogue on Purim

Meshumed—Converted Jew

Meshulach—A traveling representative of an institution (Literally, one who is sent)

Mezuzah—Small encased scroll, containing important Biblical sections. Attached to doorposts of Jewish homes, proclaiming their Jewishness

Mitzvah—Good deed (Literally, Commandment)

Purim—Holiday commemorating saving Jewish people from hands of Haman (Story related in book of Esther)

Rosh Hashanah—Jewish New Year

Shames—Sexton, beadle

Shevuos—Feast of Weeks. Pentecost

Shivah—First seven days of mourning (Literally, seven)

Shofar—Ram's horn, sounded in Synagogue during Rosh Hashanah services

Shool—Synagogue

Simcha—Joyous celebration

Simchas Torah—Rejoicing of Law. Concluding day of fall holiday season. Marked in synagogue by a procession with the scrolls, also by completing and starting anew the reading of the scroll

Succoth—Feast of Tabernacles

Siyum—Presentation ceremony of a Torah, also completion of Talmudic section. (Literally, completion)

Tnoyim—Engagement certificate, also engagement ceremony

Torah—Law, Pentateuch Scroll used in synagogue services, also applied to learning, culture and general knowledge

Yahrzeit—Anniversary of death, usually of parents

Yizkor—Memorial services

Yom Kippur—Day of Atonement, most solemn of all Jewish holidays

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